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B STRIKER '25 WINS SGA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

By SUSANNA SCHATZ
Senior News Editor

Brandon Straker '25, known as B Striker, has been elected as Middlebury's next SGA president. Striker, along with vice presidents Talia Chang '26 and Daniza Tazabekova '26, beat opponent Josh Harkins '25 and his vice-presidential candidates Freddi Mitchell '25 and Ahmed Awadallah '26 by a 32-vote margin in a three-day period from April 11 to April 13, the closest an SGA presidential election has been in at least seven years.

In the election for SGA president, 46.7% of eligible students voted (1,372 of 2,938 undergraduate students). Striker received 657 votes while Harkins got 625, which is equivalent to 47.9% and 45.5% of the vote, respectively. Ninety students, or 6.6% of voters, chose neither candidate.

Striker is a first-generation college student from Washington, D.C. He studied away at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS) in the fall and is currently studying abroad in Spain.

The SGA set a voter turnout goal of 70.2%. While the actual turnout fell short of this target, the percentage of students who voted this year was higher than it was in last year's SGA presidential election, in which approximately 44% of eligible students voted.

The candidates who ran in the Feb Senator election, Islam Abushareah '26.5 and Natalie Frankel '27.5, and Sophomore Senator election, Guler Aycicek '27 and Anina Dentel-Pham '27, ran uncontested.

Five candidates ran for Junior Senator, with Joshua Garson '26 and Anna Miller '26 winning the position for the fall semester and Bryan Harris '26 and Claudia Lopez '26 winning for the spring semester. Three candidates ran for the Senior Senator position, and current SGA vice presidents Fanta Diop '25 and Tara Masri '25 won the race.

Striker spoke positively of his campaign and election experience.

"It felt like a really friendly competition because at the end of the day I had this mindset that, like, we're on each other's team," Striker said. "We had the same goals, but it was just a matter of who the students wanted to vote for."

He and his running mates emphasized four areas on which they would focus: community, access, health and transparency. After winning the race, Striker spoke with The Campus about the issues he plans to prioritize in his term as president.

Regarding his goal of strengthening Middlebury's community, he described working with the Middlebury College Activities Board and fostering a good relationship between students and staff.

"We just need to learn to appreciate our staff," Striker said. "Then maybe have some, like, staff appreciation days."

Other means of community-building Striker discussed throughout his campaign included organizing class assemblies and dinners, restarting the program he created called 4Meals which helps students meet new people over meals, sponsoring more facilitated conversations, planning more school-wide events and bridging the athlete non-athlete divide.

Striker sees building a strong community as the basis of all other improvements he hopes to make at Middlebury.

"The things that are for our access would just open up because we have a stronger community," he said.

In regards to student health,

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MULTIMEDIA

Proctor Dining Hall: Community, Cooking and Connection

By AMELIA COLDER
Contributing Writer

Both college staff and students have long enjoyed the sense of community within Middlebury dining. However, policy adjustments that affect staff employment and autonomy represent a steady shift in dining over the past 15 years that is changing this pillar of campus life.

The connections between staff at Proctor Dining Hall are essential to their work experience and positive attitudes, and to the overall dining environment. While there is a strong sense of fulfillment and connection felt among many of the current dining hall staff, the implementation of new policies — including hard caps on wages and changes to the food production structure — threaten this unique sense of community for long-time staff.

"Back then it was a real tight sense of family," said Tim Whitney, a cook at Proctor for over 20 years, reflecting on his early days working at Middlebury. "You came to work, you worked, and outside work you went out and you did stuff with these people. Now, that's really not the case."

Despite the changed nature of the current staff dynamics, many Proctor staff remain happy with their jobs and commented on the sense of satisfaction they feel in their positions. Staff largely attributed this contentment to the new people who have been hired, and the approach of staff in administrative positions.

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JUNE SU / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Dining Services staff in Proctor Dining Hall unloads carton after carton of eggs to prepare an early morning breakfast for students.

New contracted counselor hosts Queer and Trans Student Wellness Day

By CHARLIE KEOHANE
Editor at Large

Adam-Jon Aparicio is the latest addition to the counseling staff at the Parton Center for Health and Wellness (CHW). Aparicio, who identifies as a first-generation college graduate and gay Latino man, is a contracted counselor for students working virtually from Chicago. This past weekend, Aparicio visited Middlebury to connect with students and facilitate the Queer and Trans Student Wellness Day at the Prism Center for Queer and Trans Life on April 13.

Director of Counseling Tammy Austin noted that the CHW has previously received student input requesting counselors from more diverse and representative identity groups. In last year's Zeitgeist 5.0 survey, 426 students said they had used Middlebury counseling services. When asked if they felt their counselor was able to connect with them based on their identity, 46% of respondents said no. Sixty-nine percent of POC students said no, and 50% of LGBTQ students said no.

"We definitely have heard from student voices that students are interested in meeting with counselors who share similar identities," Austin said in an interview with

COURTESY PHOTO

Adam-Jon Aparicio visited campus last week to host Queer and Trans Student Wellness Day at the Prism Center.

The Campus. "But [we are] really trying to make sure that we can expand as much as we can. So being able to find counselors who we are able to contract for some of their time, to be able to have some of that capacity to serve students and just offer greater experiences for our students."

Before Aparicio received his

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ARTS & CULTURE

"LEGALLY BLONDE": ILLEGALLY GOOD

By KATIE FUTTERMAN
Managing Editor

COURTESY PHOTO / LIZ DONALDSON

The cast sings a crows favorite, "Gay or European?"

"Legally Blonde: The Musical" had the whole audience saying, "Omigod, oh my god, you guys." Most attendees were struck by the high-energy, hilarious show. Others simply could not get that catchy tune out of their heads.

Middlebury students, faculty and community members alike danced over to the The Town Hall Theater on April 11 and 12 — the coolest of viewers wearing pink, because... duh.

Many of us have seen the classic 2001 film "Legally Blonde" starring Reese Witherspoon, but the musical, which came out in 2007, brings the spirit of the piece to a whole new level. The famous "bend and snap" move turned into a spicy dance number, and the question of the sexuality of the pool boy in the central trial of the story became one of the crowd's favorite songs: "Gay or European?"

The plot of the musical largely aligns with that of the film. UCLA sorority girl Elle Woods (Patrice Cahill '25.5) follows her ex-boyfriend Warner Huntington III (Quinn Donaldson '26.5) to Harvard Law School after he dumps her for not being "serious" enough.

"I'm doing this for love, and love will see me through," she sings to the crowd in the musical number "What You Want." That same number finds Cahill breaking out her tap moves while spitting legal jargon like "May I approach?" in place of Harvard applicants' traditional personal essay.

But upon arrival, there is little love to be found. Warner is dating Vivienne Kensington (Kate Ryan '24.5), who embodies this desired "seriousness" in every way (at least in the first act, the only smile that crosses her face appears when dissing Elle). Faced with a romantic rival, Elle must go from a dumb blonde to legally blonde, with the help of Emmett Forrest (Thomas Long '25), with whom she shares a magical kiss in the final number.

The show's greatest strength was its vibrant energy. The crowd could feel just how much fun the cast was having, and they reacted with laughter throughout and a roaring standing ovation to finish.

Cahill embodied Elle's bubbly personality from start to finish. She strutted across the stage in three-inch heels, belting out songs ranging from tragic to hilarious. But this energy may not have

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NINE NEW ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIPS TO EXPAND SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS

By JESSICA LI
Staff Writer

Over the past year, Middlebury has received more than $11 million to establish endowed professorships, which support a faculty member's teaching and scholarship within a specific academic department. Since the launch of the "For Every Future" campaign in the summer of 2021, the college has raised a total of $25.8 million for endowed professorships.

Most recent additions are in departments such as Geography and Physics, in addition to two professorships of the practice, a program which brings in instructors who teach courses based on their professional experience.

"Faculty are the heart of a Middlebury education, and gifts for professorships are among the most important ways donors can support the College and ensure that excellence in teaching and scholarship remain the foundation of all we do," said President Laurie Patton in the announcement of the positions in late March. "Endowed professorships enable us to honor, reward, and retain outstanding faculty members and to encourage young faculty members to make Middlebury their professional home."

The Tamar Mayer Professorship in Geography was funded by an anonymous donor. The endowment will support the salary and benefits of a faculty member in the geography department and help fund that faculty member's research, professional development and student-mentored research.

It was named for Tamar "Timi" Mayer, the Robert R. Churchill professor emerita of Geosciences and former director of the Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs and the Program in International and Global Studies.

In an interview with The Campus, Mayer expressed excitement about the future of the Geography Department.

"I think that, first of all, it's a testimony to the teaching of the Geography Department, to the rigor in the Geography Department. But I think it also is a testimony that somebody thinks that it is worthy to study geography for all host of reasons. And by endowing a chair like this, somebody would be carrying my legacy forward," she said.

The Mittelman family honored the late Middlebury alumnus David Mittelman '76 through the David R. Mittelman '76 Professorship in Astronomy and Astrophysics. In 2017, the Mittelman Observatory in McCardell Bicentennial Hall was named for him and his contributions to Middlebury as a former member of the Board of Trustees.

Mittleman also previously funded the creation of the Frank Winkler professorship in 2014, having been inspired by an astronomy class he took during his time at the college taught by Gamaliel Painter Bicentennial Professor Emeritus of Physics Frank Winkler. Professor Michael Dunham, the newly appointed David R. Mittelman Professor of Physics, will join Middlebury this summer and begin teaching in fall 2024, according to Eilat Glikman, Frank Winkler professor of astrophysics.

With the added professorship, the Physics Department aims to provide a broader range of courses and research opportunities, particularly in astronomy and astrophysics.

"We made a very conscious effort when we hired to make sure that we all work in very different areas," Glikman told The Campus."We thought to create this very broad tapestry of options, so that students have different options for research, and that we can develop a broader range of elective courses and just bring different sorts of things into the classroom."

The department is still deliberating on how to best utilize the endowment to benefit students in the department and those generally interested in physics. One proposed idea is to invite guest lecturers from various institutions to Middlebury, allowing them to deliver lectures and share their experiences.

"We're in the northeast, we're not that far from Boston, which has some of the greatest astronomy research going on in the world... you just draw a reasonable radius, and you can invite people to come and speak to our students and share with them even more about what's going on in the universe and new things. That's something that we really want to be able to do," Glikman said.

The college additionally received two funded professorships from Graham '89 and Shelley Goldsmith: the Goldsmith Family Endowed Professor of the Practice in the Liberal Arts and the Goldsmith Family Endowed Professor of the Practice in Global Health. These endowments aim to expand Middlebury's curriculum by bringing people with extensive professional experience to undergraduate classrooms.

"The Goldsmiths' goal is to help Middlebury expand the curriculum to meet changing student needs and to bring real-world expertise to the undergraduate classroom," said Vice President for Advancement Dan Courcey in the college's announcement for the new positions.

Professors of the practice leverage their extensive professional networks to bring guest speakers to campus, help students find internships and other experiential learning opportunities, and create ways for faculty members to develop critical research partnerships, the March 25 announcement described.

"These gifts for professorships are a testament to the strength of our faculty, the excellence of their research, and their dedication to students," Courcey said.

NEW CONTRACTED COUNSELOR HOSTS QUEER AND TRANS STUDENT WELLNESS DAY

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master's degree from the University of Vermont, he worked as a residential director in housing and as a residential assistant at multiple colleges. He described discovering the value of being a leader and offering support through those roles, which sparked his interest in returning to school to become a licensed professional counselor.

"I really value working with students who have never seen a counselor before or who have maybe even had maybe not the best experience with counselors in the past, whether that was at university or college. My whole joy comes from helping rewrite the story of what counseling can be with a client," Aparicio said.

Aparicio believes that counseling is an individual experience and values building a personal relationship with his clients.

"I personally think that counseling is an individual one-on-one relationship that can't be duplicated and really is dependent on the client and students in front of me. And essentially, that just means meeting the student where they're at," he said.

Additionally, Aparicio likes to bring levity and humor into his conversations with clients.

"So we talk about pop culture, we talk about trauma still, and family dynamics, but just also like, what is it like to be a student in this moment, and helping the student get grounded in the here and now," Aparicio said.

Though Aparicio typically meets with students virtually, he came to Middlebury for the weekend to host the Queer and Trans Student Wellness Day.

"This is a day that we've really structured around building a sense of community and being able to be together," Austin said.

Queer and Trans Student Wellness Day included a catered breakfast, lunch and dinner from Crooked Ladle Catering, aimed at allowing students to immerse themselves in the day and develop connections that last beyond the one-time event.

The day included workshops on how to further involvement in the community, conversations about love and healthy relationships, and tips on maintaining one's own wellness when helping friends and family.

"My hope is to talk to folks about how to authentically put up boundaries for yourself, because social media will give you tips and tricks but sometimes they're not realistic. My hope is that we get to talk about how to make this realistic for you, because your wellness is important," Aparicio said in an interview before the Queer and Trans Student Wellness Day.

In addition to group activities, the day included giveaways, a therapy dog visit, and forest and nature therapy guided walks.

Aparicio described being attracted to working at a residential college like Middlebury because of its tight-knit community.

"I really value the small liberal arts education. There's nothing like going away to school and feeling like you're almost on this island of learning and community," Aparicio said. "[It's] appealing to help a community that's already doing well just get that much better."

Outside of work, Aparicio is in several LGBT recreational sports leagues, including kickball and volleyball.

"It's fun to get back into play. And I think that's a big part of your mental health wellness, to remember that being silly and trying something new is so helpful for your mental health overall," Aparicio said.

Aparicio encourages students to reach out to counseling to schedule an appointment, even if they're unfamiliar with counseling services. All counseling services by the CHW are free for Middlebury students.

In addition to Aparicio, Alyssa Brown also started this year as a contracted virtual counselor. According to her bio on the college's website, Brown identifies as Black, queer and neurodivergent, and they are looking forward to connecting with the Middlebury community.

"We will figure it out together. My main goal is just to make sure that students, however they identify, feel comfortable meeting with me. It can be weird to meet with someone over the internet, but I like to make it as comfortable an experience as possible," Aparicio said.

"FEMINISM, FASCISM AND THE FUTURE" TACKLES ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT

COURTESY PHOTO / KARIN HANTA
The Gensler Symposium invited five guest speakers to discuss "Feminism, Fascism and the Future."

By ELLIE TRINKLE
News Editor

The annual Gensler Family Symposium on Feminism in the Global Arena returned to Middlebury on April 11 and 12, with the theme "Feminism, Fascism and the Future." The symposium aims to bring feminist scholars to campus to explore important world issues through a feminist lens.

Established in 2007 by the Gensler Family Foundation and hosted by the Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies (GSFS) program, the symposium selects a topic each year around which to structure the talks of the guest speakers. This year's topic sought to explore the anti-gender movement and strategize ways to fight against it.

"The anti-gender movement wants to ban abortion, deny LGBTQ+ persons their rights, and, more broadly, curtail democratic institutions in order to make this happen," Laurie Essig, professor of Gender, Sexuality, Feminist Studies, wrote in an email to The Campus. "Whatever our areas of specialization are, we all need to pay attention to the anti-gender movement."

The topic was inspired by the podcast of the same name, which is a collaborative effort between Essig, Professor of Luso-Hispanic Studies Patricia Saldarriaga and Associate Professor of Writing and Rhetoric and Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies Catharine Wright. In the summer of 2023, the three traveled to Mexico City to interview feminist colleagues for the podcast.

El Fahey '26 is in Essig's "Feminist Theory" class, where she has spent the semester creating a podcast episode with her peers. Fahey is researching bills in Florida that perpetuate the anti-gender movement, such as the "Don't Say Gay Bill."

"The podcast is a work of love and feminist community — it involves students, colleagues (here at Middlebury and elsewhere) and friends trying to get word out about the anti-gender movement," Essig wrote.

In September, the Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies department decided who they wanted to invite to speak at the symposium, some of whom were already podcast participants.

The first event, on April 11, was a silent podcast listening party of "Feminism, Fascism & the Future," hosted by Essig. Attendees scanned a QR code to listen to the podcast on their devices with either their own headphones or ones that were provided. After listening to the episode, Essig facilitated a group discussion centered around the current policies in place that perpetuate anti-gender ideology and the structural changes that are necessary to combat them.

On April 12, the five speakers gave their talks, which were accompanied by a breakfast of bagels and lox, coffee and a catered lunch at Hillcrest.

"I really appreciated multiple talks on the anti-gender movement because it's something that is very real in our country, yet not given enough publicity," Daisy Kulina '26 wrote in an email to The Campus.

Siobhan F. Guerrero Mc Manus, a researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Sciences and Humanities, gave a talk titled "Discursive And Political Convergences Between The New Right And Trans-Exclusionary Feminism." Mc Manus discussed the discursive convergences between the new right and trans-exclusionary feminism.

Journalist Julianna Neuhouser's talk was titled "The Strange Marriage Of Right-Wing Anti-Gender Ideology Activists And Trans-Exclusionary Feminists," and highlighted the key actors in the overlap between trans-exclusionary feminism and the right-wing anti-gender activists, particularly in Mexico.

"[Neuhouser] said that while Mexican left-wing parties are opening the door to right-wingers (in terms of gender discourse), in the U.S., TERFs [trans-exclusionary radical feminists] give right-wingers the ideology they need to keep the war on gender alive," Kulina wrote.

Kulina attended both Mc Manus and Neuhouser's talks, and wrote that they complemented one another by highlighting the harmful discourse that feeds the anti-gender movement.

Karina Bárcenas Barajas, senior researcher at the Social Research Institute of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, gave a talk titled "Anti-gender movements in Latin America: a genealogy between neoconservatism and post-fascism." The talk considered evangelical politicization in anti-gender movements in Latin American countries.

Nicole Erin Morse, associate professor of Media Studies and director of the Center for Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Florida Atlantic University, gave a talk titled "DeSantis vs. Gender Studies: Fascism in the Freest State in the Nation." Morse evaluated the DeSantis administration's attack on academic freedom, and what it reveals about the masculinist, militaristic and apocalyptic impulse behind fascist attacks on gender studies in the U.S.

Agneszka Graff, associate professor at the American Studies Center at the University of Warsaw, gave a talk titled "Anti-Gender Politics: Traditionalism, Illiberalism, Or Neo-Fascism?" Graff's talk explored the anti-gender worldview through the lens of what is happening in Spain, Hungary and Poland.

"I was so excited to see all these amazing scholars (and one journalist) of the anti-gender movement in one room," Essig wrote. "It was so good to see them interact with one another, to think about what is the same and different about say, Florida, Mexico and Poland. And to imagine how feminist resistance can push back against these movements."

Kulina wrote that the symposium helped her to understand facism's negative effect on feminism and other political movements, and how taking time to learn about this helps mobilize people in the fight against the anti-gender movement. She commended the symposium for bringing to light issues that do not often receive sufficient public exposure.

Fahey agreed, adding that the events showed her the importance of putting feminism at the center of political discourse.

"I think that is the main thing we should take out of this symposium as a whole, is that feminism shouldn't be micro, it should be more on a macroscale and the generalness of feminism broadens the scope and can bring us all together to start a revolution," Fahey said.

GlobeMed rebrands to Global Health Equity at Middlebury after national organization closes

By OLIVIA MUELLER
News Editor

THEA VOLPP

Along with the change in their name came a new logo for Global Health Equity at Middlebury.

The Middlebury chapter of GlobeMed club has rebranded to Global Health Equity (GHEM), following a vote of approval by club members in January. GlobeMed's national nonprofit shut down at the end of 2022 due to financial struggles, prompting a pivot in the club's name and activities at Middlebury.

Co-president Gabriella Chalker '24 explained that the club wanted to change its name in hopes that the new name would better represent the organization's goals and values.

"We wanted something that more clearly emphasized our focus on equity, social justice and interdisciplinary approaches to health. We felt GlobeMed had a connotation of "medicine," which historically attracted predominantly STEM majors and pre-med students to the club," Chalker wrote in an email to The Campus.

Co-director of Communications Helen Vaughan '24.5 sent a poll out to the club last fall to get input on a new name.

"Once we decided on GHEM, I reached out to some student artists to see if someone would be interested in creating a new logo design," Vaughan wrote in an email to The Campus.

Thea Volpp '24 designed the new logo, which the club adopted at the end of J-Term and have been using during the spring semester.

With the club's newfound independence has also come new challenges. GlobeMed previously provided national funding to its chapter groups, which ceased with the closure of the organization.

"Being the president has been difficult as we navigate the transition period of no longer having national support, especially with the summer internship," Chalker wrote, referring to GlobeMed's Grassroots On-Site Work (GROW) internship. "But, it has also been extremely rewarding."

In addition to its on-campus meetings, the club currently works with Conservation Heritage Turambe, an NGO in Rwanda. The club meets with members of the NGO monthly over Zoom and conducts fundraising events every semester for the organization, according to Chalker.

The club also sends summer interns to Rwanda. Interns and fundraising support the NGO's activities, which include educating local youth on good health practices, providing sanitation services and promoting conservation through replanting and protection of the nearby Volcanoes National Park.

Chalker and co-president Chris Donohue '24 have worked to continue to draw new members to the club and create quality programming.

The overall structure of the club and its meetings have remained consistent throughout the rebranding.

"Our activities and mission have not changed since the switch. We loved the partnership model of GlobeMed and its goals, we just wanted a name that was more appropriate," Vaughan wrote.

The organization meets every Sunday, where two members of the executive board lead presentations. Some weeks feature guest speakers, who range from faculty, alumni and professionals in health fields, and discuss diverse topics such as migrant health, discrimination in medicine, reproductive justice in the United States, the HIV and AIDs pandemic, and other intersections of health and social issues.

The GHEM club is now aiming to preserve its global focus while also expanding local outreach and engagement.

"A goal we've had for a while that we're really trying to establish this year is a local community partner in Vermont — perhaps that we could volunteer at during the school year and send interns to during the summer or J-Term," Chalker wrote.

Despite the recent rebranding and associated challenges, the club's presence on campus and its tight-knit community will remain largely unchanged. Chalker has been a part of the club since her first semester at Middlebury and said she has treasured the learning and connections she has made.

"My favorite part is the people; GlobeMed has been like a family to me for the past four years. It has entirely shaped my Middlebury experience and future interests. Through the club, I've met some of my best friends and the people who I look up to the most," Chalker wrote.

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Striker said he plans to make classrooms more accessible and work with Counseling Services to ensure students receive adequate support. He described this as "maximizing our efficiency and strengthening our infrastructure."

He also intends to improve student health by diversifying food options in dining halls, particularly between 2 and 4:30 p.m., and pushing for healthier late-night food options at the Grille and Midd Xpress.

Striker highlighted his team's goal of being transparent about all decisions made by SGA.

"We want the student body to kind of know, like, we just want to have this really, really open line of communication," Striker said.

Striker anticipates that engaging students in the work SGA does could be a challenge, citing that just below 50% of students voted in this election. He hopes to get students more engaged with SGA by being open about what they are working on and by prioritizing community-building events.

"Another challenge is just making everybody happy with the decisions that we make," he added.

Striker and his vice presidents plan to use surveys to ask the student body what changes they would like to see.

"We want to advocate for what the students want. But, like, some students want this, some students want that, and the goal is, like, to advocate for what the majority wants," Striker said. "Definitely sending out surveys to… actually get a number of, like, what the majority wants."

Vice-president-elects Chang and Tazabekova spoke with The Campus about the campaign and their plans going into their new roles. They noted their appreciation for Striker's engagement with what has been happening on campus while he has been away, and spoke with optimism about the upcoming year working together.

Chang is passionate about the changes the team plans to make regarding student health.

"Something I'm really excited about is working with the disability resource center, the DRC and faculty to ensure that classrooms are more accessible to students," Chang said.

She hopes to make closed captioning required on videos shown in the classroom and create guidelines that give students more flexibility when they need to miss class because of extenuating circumstances.

Tazabekova emphasized community-building as a priority for her going into next year. "If you have a strong sense of community, there's, like, a trickle down effect in terms of having a better sense of respect across campus, treating people with respect and kindness… having more accessibility, which translates to better health and better transparency within the administration," she said.

The team noted that applications for SGA cabinet positions will go out this week, and anyone is welcome to apply.

In a video released on April 16 on his campaign Instagram page, Harkins reflected on his campaign experience. "Congrats to B Striker's campaign, you guys ran a great campaign," Harkins said in the video. "Thank you to Freddi and Ahmed for being incredible partners on this campaign and just having great ideas. Thank you to everyone who supported us."

Ultimately, Striker said he and his vice presidents are in the business of serving the student body.

"We're here for the students," Striker said. "This is a win for the entire school, and I'm really excited for the future."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Middlebury modifies directory to require login, aiming to prevent phishing

By LIV SANCHEZ
Staff Writer

The online directory has changed from public to restricted access in order to guard against phishing and other potential security issues. Announced on April 10, the new system requires a Middlebury log-in to access contact information, as opposed to the previous directory, which made such information available to the public.

The decision was made by senior leadership from the Offices of Student Life, Enterprise Risk, Information Technology Services (ITS), and Communications and Marketing, according to Chris Norris, vice president for Information Technology.

In an email to The Campus, Norris highlighted that even though the online directory has been historically protected by various privacy and security controls to limit user access, there was enough contact information available for scammers to create intricate phishing schemes.

"Enough individual contact information remained public for online scammers to launch sophisticated email phishing attacks, such as sending emails designed to trick community members into entering their Middlebury credentials into fake login pages used to compromise accounts and gain unauthorized access to personal and private information," Norris wrote.

The change aims to fix the security issue while still providing access for the Middlebury community, Norris described.

"While this one change cannot eliminate all of the above-mentioned concerns, moving the online directory behind Middlebury authentication reduces public availability of individual contact information, while still providing access for our community members," he wrote.

Norris did not cite any specific incidents of online scams, but noted that the rate of digital crime is increasing on a general scale. He emphasized the importance of protecting community members against online threats such as financial fraud, identity theft and harassment.

"This change represents a privacy and security improvement for our students, faculty, and staff," Norris wrote.

SGA REOPENS 10 O'CLOCK ROSS

By MANDY BERGHELA
Local Editor

Last month, the Student Government Association (SGA) reinstated 10 o'clock Ross in the Fireplace Lounge, providing bagels, cereal, fruit and more to students from 10 p.m. to midnight on Monday through Thursday.

10 o'clock Ross has been an on-and-off program for several years now, and had not been running since the spring 2022 semester until now. The purpose of the reinstatement of the program is to provide free food to students, rather than having to purchase food items after the dining halls close at 8:30 p.m.

"It started about 6 or 7 years ago with a SGA proposal," wrote Dan Detora, executive director of food service operations, in an email to The Campus. "The SGA wanted a late-night alternative that didn't cost students extra money like Midd Xpress or the Grille. But there were issues including theft, so we had to stop it for some time. Also, it is staffed with students through the SGA and there were times when they did not have staff to work."

The program had previously placed a larger burden on the dining staff, but students are now spearheading the initiative. Dining services still funds and provides all the food, but it is SGA that runs the program and sets up the fireplace lounge. SGA also funds the payment of student workers who run 10 o'clock Ross.

"The new system does not impact us [Dining Services] all that much as now we are just rolling carts of food into the lounge when we close Ross," Detora wrote. "The biggest impact is setting up the carts during the day with the food. It is much easier on us this year compared to years past."

Despite the changes that have shifted responsibilities to SGA, some staff members have taken issue with increased duties related to the program without any new staff hires to support it, according to The Campus' reporting.

Many students have shared positive impressions of the reinstatement of 10 o'clock Ross, which they said provides not only a way to eat without the burden of cost, but also a great social scene during the week.

"There is great turnout, and I love working there because now that it has been going on for nearly a month now, I basically see the same people each time, and it is a nice sense of community that is cultivated there, " said Clay Rosser '26, who works as a student monitor for 10 o'clock Ross.

"Turnout has been pretty high, but it fluctuates, and we can see more students when there are group projects or midterms going on," he said.

Bryan Harris '26, a sophomore senator in SGA, said that there are often at least 10 to 12 students hanging out in the fireplace lounge, but sometimes 30 or 40 people in come at one time.

"Students need to eat after 8:30 p.m.," Harris said. "Middlebury is essentially a food desert when the dining halls close, and when some students are studying until 3 a.m., having access to free food is crucial, so I am glad SGA was able to reinstate this."

Despite 10 o'clock Ross' somewhat turbulent, on and off history, students are optimistic about its future. "I would be surprised if it did not continue," Rosser said. "So many people use it every single night, and people need the food."

Harris agreed that the program could have a long lifespan.

"It is sustainable. It is only two hours a day, essentially eight hours a week, and the food that is given away is pretty basic and easy to handle."

Although its future beyond this spring is unknown, 10 o'clock Ross will be available for students for the remainder of the semester.

LIV, LOVE, LOCAL: THE STONE MILL

Liv, Love, Local is a column highlighting local businesses of Vermont, especially cafés and restaurants in the Middlebury area. Through interviews with owners, I want to highlight the specific successes and challenges that come along with small business ownership in Vermont, the hard work owners and employees put into these businesses, and how these spots serve as places to build community and connection.

By OLIVIA MUELLER
News Editor

Mary Cullinane and Stacey Rainey opened the Stone Mill in 2019 with the intention of bringing their different experiences together under one roof and providing a unique hub for the community. The Stone Mill is a mixed-use building located on Mill Street, housing The Mad Taco, office spaces available for annual lease, four hotel rooms and a public market with retailers including Addison West, Dedalus Wine and Cheese Shop and the Stone Mill Collection.

Rainey moved to Weybridge, Vt. with her family before to her longtime friend Cullinane, but she too eventually made the move to Vermont as well in 2016, marking a transition in her career to be more community-focused.

Once the two were living in the same state, they founded Community Barn Ventures in 2017 — a consultancy that works with small businesses in the northeast to provide strategy advice, financial analysis and other services.

Cullinane said Rainey's and her skill sets and professional experiences complement one another, working as business partners. Cullinane praised Rainey's ability to execute on projects, while she is better at strategy, motivating others and initially taking on projects.

"That being said, we also wanted to not only just be consultants, we wanted to do it, and be a small business in the community that we've lived in," Cullinane told The Campus.

When the college put the Stone Mill up for sale in 2019 — a location which used to be used by Middlebury students for experiential learning projects — the pair seized on the opportunity to repurpose the space and put their consulting insights into practice.

"Because Vermont and its downtowns are so small, you need to focus on experiences, not transactions, and you need multiple reasons for people to come," Cullinane said.

Cullinane described their inspiration for the business model of the Stone Mill as The Shed, a store located in Napa Valley, Calif. While The Shed has since closed, Cullinane said they appreciated the store's ethos focused on quality and providing goods and services that would otherwise be difficult to find.

"We wanted some type of retail that allowed us to bring to Middlebury things that otherwise might be difficult to get, like the Dedalus wine selection," Cullinane said.

Dedalus Wine and Cheese, which has a wine bar location in Burlington, specializes in wine from producers that have low intervention with their grapes, and that produce small batches not available at most grocery stores.

The pair personally curate the items found in the Stone Mill Collection, which includes stationary, stickers, pens and small books.

Cullinane described the easy access to other local businesses as a key benefit of working in Vermont.

"You can access the people who are making the decisions very easily," she said. "Here, owners are picking up the phone."

Cullinane and Rainey were able to directly approach Sarah Phaneauf, owner of the SLATE home goods store based in Burlington, and one of the Stone Mill's first partners.

Despite the convenience of the Vermont community, operating the Stone Mill does not come without its challenges, chief among them being staffing — it can be difficult to hire people to clean the hotel rooms, Cullinane said.

While she and Rainey are committed to stepping in as much as possible to keep the Stone Mill operating, they have other responsibilities at Community Barn Ventures, making the balance of managing both businesses difficult on days when staffing is low.

"Right now we have an advertisement out for cleaners upstairs, it's $30 an hour to clean a hotel room. And we might not get a response. That makes it really, really hard," Cullinane said.

In addition to some staffing challenges, the Stone Mill has weathered physical challenges in recent years. Last summer's flooding caused thousands of dollars of damage to The Mad Taco, which is located on the basement level of the building.

The Stone Mill closed for a period in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but the business has been successful in recovering from these challenges amidst high interest rates and inflation. Cullinane described the business landscape of Midlebury and a strong community response as having played a pivotal role in helping the Stone Mill bounce back from the pandemic.

According to Cullinane, downtown Middlebury is a place where fellow owners are very friendly and supportive of each other. "We're all incredibly committed to each other's success. That is so important. To be operating in an environment where you feel like people are rooting for you — rather than competing against you — makes it a lot more fun," she said.

She added that Middlebury has a particularly close knit business community.

"It's important for folks to realize that anything that you can do to contribute to the vibrancy of Main Street, the economic foundation... is very important."

OLIVIA MUELLER/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Coming soon to The Stone Mill is the official opening of the wine bar in the Public Market, repurposing the area previously occupied by The Lost Monarch.

Because of the mixed use of the space, the customer base at the Stone Mill is broad, from Middlebury students eating at the Mad Taco, to visitors to the college staying in the hotel rooms to shoppers at the Public Market. This customer base encompasses locals, tourists and students alike, Cullinane said.

"I think it's a little bit different than anything else in Middlebury," she added. "That's been fun, to see other people appreciate it."

Cullinane and Rainey aim to keep the Stone Mill space dynamic and constantly evolving. Cullinane and Rainey renovated the space in January, partnering with Bethanie Farrell, owner of the Giving Fridge, who provided the plants now displayed around the Stone Mill.

Coming soon is the official opening of the Dedalus-sourced wine bar in the Public Market, which will repurpose the area formerly occupied by the Lost Monarch Coffee Bar. The wine bar has been approved by the Vermont Department of Health and will open pending full approval from the liquor department.

In addition to the wine bar and indoor wine tasting events, summer will bring expanded programming for the Stone Mill. "Having programs with Dedalus doing things outside; it's going to be great," Cullinane said. "We're looking forward to a really strong summer."

WHAT TO DO IN MUD SEASON IN VERMONT

By JULIA PEPPER
Senior Local Editor

Mud season. Your sneakers are soaked, your clothes are spotted with dirt and the trees are somehow still barren.

Do we even have spring in Vermont? When will mud season be over? These are things you might be asking yourself as we are in the thick of April in Vermont.

But mud season doesn't have to be just brown and boring. There are a myriad of ways to get outside and enjoy it.

Mud season is the transition period between winter and summer, usually beginning when the snow starts melting in late March or early April and ending in early June, according to the Green Mountain Club.

Soil can freeze up to 70 inches below the ground during mud season. As the air temperature warms, the thawing ground releases water, but temperature fluctuations keep the lower ground frozen for longer, preventing water at the surface from draining, according to the Green Mountain Club. This creates some serious muddiness. Add frequent rains, and it is even muddier.

Vermont's grounds get particularly muddy because its soil is extremely clay rich, allowing it to hold a lot of water, Elise Chan '24, co-president of Fostering Inclusive Recreation Experiences (FIRE) and coordinator of the Gear Room, told The Campus.

Chan, who hails from Seattle, had to learn to adjust to Vermont's mud season.

"In Seattle, we don't have mud season. It's wet all year around. The kind of soil we have is really different," she said. Chan also acknowledged that mud season can be frustrating.

"Everything is really brown, and really wet," she said.

Still, Chan described a number of activities people can enjoy outdoors during the unique time of year that is mud season.

COURTESY PHOTO/ELISE CHAN

Last spring, FIRE led a hike in collaboration with Creating Art Together. Participants took advantage of mud season's lack of leaves to paint the views they saw on the hike.

"Riding bikes is a great mud season activity," she said. "You can see a lot more with trees that are free of leaves."

The Muddy Onion gravel ride is an upcoming mud season event on April 27 hosted by Onion River Outdoors, an outdoor gear and apparel shop in Montpelier, Vt. Rather than a formal race, the ride is a celebration of mud, community and bikes — "three things we love! Well... maybe not the mud," the event's website reads.

Chan said she plans to participate in the Muddy Onion ride, and described it as a fun way to get as muddy as possible and enjoy the season.

Dean of Students Derek Doucet, who previously supervised outdoor programming at Middlebury for many years, described his appreciation for mud season in Vermont

"The early spring season offers tons of options," Doucet wrote in an email to The Campus. "The mountain bike trails (like most hiking trails) are generally too wet and fragile for a few weeks yet, but the dirt roads come back into shape after the thaw pretty quickly, making for great riding."

Beyond biking, mud season is a great time for activities on the water.

"This is the time when local rivers and creeks predictably have the most water, making it a great time to canoe and kayak," wrote Doucet. "I'm not just referring to white water paddling though. A warm April day can be a beautiful time to canoe many of the easy, mostly flatwater rivers that become too shallow as summer arrives."

Spring is also a prime time for fishing in Vermont. MiddFly Fly Fishing is a club that leads workshops teaching participants how to do the activity in Vermont's waters. Their gear is available to rent through the gear room, according to Chan.

Rock climbing is another popular activity during mud season, Doucet wrote. He explained in the region near Bolton, Vt., many of the cliffs face south, which, along with sun exposure and a lack of leaves, can make temperatures on the rocks feel 10–15 degrees warmer than forecasted.

Plus, climbing earlier in the seasons means there are no bugs on the cliffs.

Though it is a quintessential Vermont outdoor activity, hiking can cause serious trail damage during mud season. Heavy foot traffic during mud season causes soil compaction, which occurs when stress from something like plodding hiking boots forces soil particles closer together, according to the Green Mountain Club website.

The risks of causing soil compaction during mud season make it important to check websites like the Green Mountain Club and AllTrails to get information about which trails are open and are best for mud season.

Chan cited the Addison County Bike Club and the Vermont Bike Association as good sources to check, as well. Some forest service websites also provide useful information.

Hiking on more durable trails, boardwalks and gravel paths is another way to protect trails during mud season, Chan added. There are a number of hike options on gravel trails in Burlington, she said.

Right here in Middlebury, the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM), operated by the Middlebury Area Land Trust, has many stretches that are open to be walked on during mud season, according to Tim Parsons, landscape horticulturist at the college.

"Hiking trails are closed in the spring on the higher elevations, like the Long Trail, but many down here in the Valley remain open," Parsons wrote in an email to The Campus. "I've always felt the TAM was drastically underrated, it punches way above its weight for length versus interest. I can think of few trails that rival its habitat diversity. You could spend an entire day just exploring the side trails in Battell Woods alone."

Parsons specifically highlighted the section of the TAM from the Class of '97 Trail to the Ralph Myhre Golf Course.

"We're coming up to spring ephemeral season, a type of wildflower that completes its entire life cycle before the upper canopy of trees leaf out and block the precious sunlight," he wrote.

For those looking to head outdoors this mud season, FIRE will be hosting several upcoming events, including a sailing event in collaboration with the Middlebury College Sailing Club and canoe trips on Lake Dunmore later in the semester.

The Middlebury Mountain Club also plans to do canoe guide training and day hiking training later this spring, and expects other outdoor trips will come up closer to the actual trip date, according to Elli Sterling '25, a head guide for the club.

Enjoying the mud season is possible, it just requires a mindset shift. As Chan said, "We have the rest of the year to hike." There are many other ways to enjoy the outdoors during mud season, from biking to canoeing to taking in unusually unobstructed views.

Setting the record straight: allow us to reintroduce ourselves

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

SUSANNA SCHATZ

Since 1905, The Middlebury Campus has worked to inform our community of important issues through reliable student reporting. Like most print publications in the United States, we contribute to public discourse by publishing factual news pieces and articulating arguments. As a student newspaper, our purpose comes from telling the stories that matter the most to our college community .

However, we've noticed some confusion about our process, values and goals. So allow us to reintroduce ourselves and set the record straight. Our paper includes dozens of student writers, 30 editors and six sections — a sizable team working together to produce a 12-page paper every Thursday. Within each issue, there are four sections devoted to reporting factual information on news, local issues, sports and the arts.

As a whole, the newspaper has two distinct roles. One is in our news section, which reports objectively and independently, without outside influence. These stories are objective and undergo a rigorous editing process to ensure they are accurate. The other is in the space we offer for our opinions, both in op-eds and our own opinion through our weekly editorial. While these pieces are subjective and opinionated, they are still thoroughly fact-checked and edited to ensure we only provide verifiable information to our readers.

The news section in our paper is dedicated to objective, factual reporting on critical issues on campus such as vandalism, crimes and controversial policies. In recent weeks we have encountered multiple individuals, departments and programs that have attempted to exercise editorial control over our news section. They have claimed that reporting on an issue perpetuates the injury of the original incident. We argue that letting valuable stories on campus stay unwritten in the name of conflict transformation or keeping the peace would be to promote ignorance and silence the truth. The Campus is a student-run paper, but we are independent and have a crucial role to play in the college community.

Our opinions section is a place for people from every corner of the community to express their voices. We work with writers to verify information and craft the strongest version of their argument, whether we agree with it on a personal level or not.

In our editorial, we bring the varied opinions of the board together into one unified 800-word argument. While we act as a single voice, we all list our names in each issue of the paper as proud members of the Editorial Board. Our editorials are consistently our most read articles on the website. Whether or not you agree with the argument we make in our editorial, it serves as a starting point for productive conversations about issues on campus and beyond.

As a newspaper, we value gathering facts, reporting objectively and representing a broad range of perspectives in our coverage. We are only human, however, and sometimes we make mistakes. We have an obligation to own up to our factual errors and issue a correction. It is impossible to expect us to always get everything right, but you can trust us to inform you when we make a mistake.

Last week, for instance, we published an endorsement for one of the SGA presidential candidates. After speaking at length with each presidential team about their policies and experiences, we as an Editorial Board made a unanimous decision to recommend what we believed was the best choice for SGA president based on our meeting. Our decision to do so followed precedents in previous years. Furthermore, it is common in the United States for independent newspapers to endorse candidates, as well as to research candidates and provide voters with an election guide.

We stand by our decision to both report objectively and editorialize on the candidates. We have called for civic engagement on all levels, from the national presidential election to SGA elections, and we were glad to see voter turnout increase in this year's election.

Writing an op-ed or a letter to the editor to be published in The Campus is more productive and meaningful than anonymously posting on an online forum. For a community that values belonging and positive change, we must get our information from reputable sources and engage with each other in a respectful, open forum.

We call on all members of our community, including students, faculty, staff and alumni, to participate in productive dialogue through The Middlebury Campus. We aim to provide open space for factual information and diverse perspectives. We welcome respectful disagreements, requests for clarification and notifications of our errors.

This is the power of the paper; by putting our name behind a fact-checked and edited argument in a reputable publication, a newspaper can inspire positive change within the community.

We encourage people to send tips, write op-eds and submit letters to the editor. Clubs and organizations, such as It Happens Here, Middlebury College Republicans and Blackbird Arts Journal have used our forum to spread awareness about how they want to impact the Middlebury experience for the better. If you truly take issue with our weekly editorial, write us a letter to the editor.

So now that we've reintroduced ourselves, we invite you to do the same. Share what you believe in, what you would like to see differently or what you've learned while at Middlebury.

THE PRISM CENTER NEEDS AN ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Op-Ed

Elio Farley *is a member of the class of 2024.5.*

Abell hooks quote lives in the kitchen of The Prism Center and serves as an invitation into the center's beautiful living spaces: "One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone."

The grand opening of The Prism Center for Queer and Trans Life on April 6 and the Pride Week events leading up to it were exceptional. The quality and joy of programming properly honored the five years of dedicated collaboration it took to create The Prism Center. That space is a gift to our campus, and I am grateful it exists.

But I'll be straight with you: currently, The Prism Center has no assistant director. It needs one. The fact that the Prism Center is understaffed makes it clear that it is not a financial priority of the college. The Prism Center must be properly funded and staffed in order to support queer and trans people on campus.

This spring's funding process was wildly unconventional and piecemeal. President Laurie Patton's discretionary budget supported opening costs. Other programs sent funding to The Prism Center. The Sustainability Solutions Lab paid for a student intern. The Anderson Freeman Resource Center paid for a student intern. Queer and trans students created the vibrant murals inside. Only three of us were paid, all through external sources. I spent 37 hours creating the abstract rainbow-colored hallway mural and would have been unable to contribute to the center's joyful interior if the Climate Action Fellowship had not funded me. Some students left the project because they could not afford a major uncompensated project on top of classes, jobs and extracurriculars.

If we want The Prism Center to support a thriving queer and trans campus community, we need sustainable financial and staffing support. This support starts with an assistant director and a reasonable budget. The current responsibilities of the Prism Center director include but are not limited to: outreach, education, consultation, resource access, programming creation, advocacy services, recruiting and managing student internships, overseeing in-house operations, administrative tasks and providing one-on-one support to any student, staff, or faculty of all genders and sexual and romantic orientations.

This expansive job description is too much for one person. Yet, one person is currently tasked with labor that cannot reasonably be completed alone. No matter how brilliant Director Janae Due is (and brilliant is an understatement), running The Prism Center should not be the responsibility of one person. What other campus program has only one staff member?

The Prism Center is currently hiring three student interns for next academic year. I am so stoked that the center can hire student staff. Still, an assistant director must be hired. An assistant director can support the longevity of the center, ensuring the consistency of programming and supporting students long after interns graduate. I appreciate that funding is tricky; however, the very generous $4.9 million gift for mental health and the unrestricted $40 million gift to the endowment could serve as funding sources for the position. Face masks and mental health days are great, but a properly staffed Prism Center is a better use of money for mental health.

The Prism Center is a place where queer and trans students know we are not alone. This home needs more financial and staffing support to sustainably stay that way.

COURTESY PHOTO/CHRISTOPHER SAAVEDRA-MENDEZ

Students and staff celebrated the opening of the Prism Center for Queer and Trans Life on April 6.

SARAH SAYS: DID WE KILL DEBATE?

Op-Ed

Sarah Miller *is a member of the class of 2024 and an Editor At Large.*

On a semi-weekly basis, Sarah Miller shares her thoughts on culture and campus life.

Instagram announced a big change this February: It would begin to limit political content. I didn't notice this change until a few weeks ago when many of my Middlebury classmates began to post pleas to circulate a text post instructing us how and why we should self-select back into being shown political content. I can understand why a change that seemed sudden (but wasn't actually) could be alarming. However, I was deeply relieved. Instagram, the Facebook of our generation, was never designed to facilitate substantive political discourse.

We have applied too much pressure to a platform that is fundamentally concerned with presentation. Our reliance on social media performativity has come at the expense of true political discourse and action.

In the debate over free speech, this generation, and especially this college, garners extreme scrutiny. Among the fallout of Charles Murray's spring 2017 visit to Middlebury, Middlebury became an emblem of all that had gone wrong with the belligerent left. Even The Atlantic and The New York Times weighed in on "the violent free-speech debacle."

This reputation hung over Middlebury when I applied in the fall of 2019. According to the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, Middlebury ranks as the 16th worst college for free speech. This year alone, there has been no shortage of intelligent dissections of the lackluster state of campus speech. That is a worthwhile conversation, but my objective here is something different.

What strikes me most as I examine the pictures of those Murray protesters is the unified force of their anger. I cannot imagine myself or my peers engaging in a protest with similar fury or even in similar numbers. Contrary to my expectations, I found my undergraduate experience largely defined by political inactivity.

Middlebury's rural location makes part of this inevitable; we do not live in New York or even Burlington. Yet, how to explain the fury of those students in the past? I'd like to think of our student body as a group of generally smart, generally engaged people. The problem, as I see it, comes from the lingering scars of the Charles Murray incident and the rise of social media activism.

Posting online cuts off the opportunity for dialogue. We confuse posting with speaking and create our own echo chambers built on information that is often not verified. What displeases us is easily muted, blocked or unfollowed.

With the eruption of the Israel-Gaza war, free speech has once again become a hot issue on college campuses. Often a boogeyman for conservatives and liberals alike, what remains less considered is how students chose to use their speech.

I remember the pre-political Instagram.

It was the spring of 2020, my stories were flooded with pictures, sourdough and chain online trends until, one night in May, all of that content was replaced. Suddenly my classmates and I began to post anti-racist reading lists, incidents of racism at our high school, information on nearby protests and infographics. So many infographics.

Thanks largely to Instagram, we had been transformed into the participants of an online revolution. It would take me longer still to realize the "online revolution" is inherently oxymoronic.

By virtue of its centrality to modern life, social media must now play a part in the revolution. Social media can be genuinely helpful in raising initial awareness. I felt this in the case of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the conflict in Gaza. The problem comes when we continue to rely on it as the main engine for political activism.

Not only are political statements often confused with political action, but the absence of a political statement can also now sometimes be considered a meaningful statement. In 2020, I posted on my Instagram in part out of genuine feeling, but also out of the fear that if I did not post, people would assume I was racist. This kind of rhetoric is also seen in Instagram stories from this fall: "The silence? We notice," a well circulated Instagram post reads, "So in 10–15 years when your kids come home with their history homework & ask you "how could this happen?" I want you to remember your silence." These posts set a dangerous precedent: the absence of speech comes to signify more than speech itself or, to be more accurate, someone else's speech circulated on an Instagram story.

Once we begin an argument over the "right" Instagram conduct, the activist mission has already lost.

My biggest gripe with Instagram activism is the way in which it inadvertently stymies its own goals. In 1964, Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase, "The medium is the message," which also served as the first chapter in his book "Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man." The idea that the medium in which a message is conveyed can be more important than the message is more self-evident now than it was in 1964.

Just think about your reaction when you get a news alert about some national tragedy, the same medium that communicates news of celebrity marriages and sports victories. All receive the same decibel and tone. Soon, they start to register at nearly the same importance.

So, what's the solution?

The English major in me wants to tell you to read more. Middlebury offers free subscriptions to The Economist, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and the Washington Post — each a publication committed to factual news and interesting ideas. I also recommend The Atlantic.

Reading, however, is not enough. Eventually, reading too can become an excuse for inaction.

However, I think we do ourselves a disservice if we dismiss Instagram posting entirely. In the same way I'd like to take the optimist's view of the student body, I'd also like to take the optimist's view of the Instagram 'warrior.'

I'd like to believe the Instagram posters are motivated by a genuine will to respond to injustice and by a desire to improve the world around them. Just as it's easy to post an Instagram story, it's easy to criticize the Instagram story without political engagement. Neither position is more virtuous than the other.

As Middlebury students, short of a nationally organized student movement like the Vietnam War protests, we are unlikely to affect international or national change in our time here. That, however, does not make us powerless. Our energy and our action is best expended in our community where students have successfully organized a campaign to offer a professor a tenure track position and raised staff wages.

What these two campaigns have in common is student action. In the spring of 2022, dozens of students gathered around Old Chapel to hand out their forms to administrators and in the winter of 2019, hundreds of students protested for staff wages.

Yet, also note the difference in those numbers. Hundreds in 2019 compared to approximately a dozen in 2022. Our greatest strength lies not in our screens but in our actions. Imagine how we could agitate to improve for the students, staff and professors on this campus if we utilized the full extent of our power.

It might be less glamorous, but if we turned our attention away from Instagram and to the community in which we live, there might be more opportunities for the revolution than previously realized.

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT:
ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CONSERVATION ON CAMPUS

Op-Ed

Pearl Tulay *is a member of the class of 2024.*

From Facilities Services to Environmental Affairs at Franklin Environmental Center to the architects designing our new buildings, people across campus have been working toward energy conservation. This behind the scenes work is one of the four core pillars of Energy 2028, Middlebury's sustainability initiative. Among other goals, the college is seeking a 25% reduction in energy usage on the core campus by 2028 and 100% renewable energy sourcing by 2028.

Renewable energy sourcing is up to the college, but energy usage and conservation is up to us. We need people across campus to buy into Energy 2028, work to reduce their energy use and dream up innovative energy solutions if we are going to hit that 25% goal in four years. This will involve both individual choices and the conversations we have with peers, family and friends about energy conservation.

This year marks the halfway point of Energy 2028. As of the end of fiscal year 2023, Middlebury had reached a nine percent reduction in core campus energy consumption, as compared to the fiscal year 2018 baseline. While that is a great start, we need to kick into a higher gear for the remainder of the Energy 2028 initiative.

The strong efforts from people within Facilities Services and Environmental Affairs have to be complemented with commitment from the student body, faculty and staff. It can be easy to write off our individual actions as meaninglessly tiny in comparison to the massive carbon footprint of corporations and billionaires. As an environmental studies major, I've spent countless classes discussing whether individual choices are important in making a dent in climate action and global carbon emissions.

But on a small campus like Middlebury, which has very specific energy conservation goals and only a few thousand people to carry them out, our personal actions really do matter.

I spoke with Dean Ouellette, energy and technology manager in Facilities Services, about what her department has been working on with regards to energy conservation and efficiency on campus. I found that smart heating systems are working to save energy, but students, faculty and staff can do more to use less energy.

The conventional approach to energy conservation for large institutions like Middlebury has historically relied on scheduling the temperature of each room through a centralized software. The scheduled heating systems drop the temperature in offices and academic spaces to a lower set point when outside of workday hours and on the weekends, Ouellette explained. But the estimated hours of use and nonuse may not align with the real occupation and usage of a space. Especially after Covid-19 with more people working remotely, more offices may be sitting empty a few days per week but are still being heated as if they were occupied. Given these scheduled heating systems, it is even more important that people remember to turn down their heat in their offices and dorm rooms when leaving, whether for a remote workday or a weekend off-campus.

These issues drove Facilities Services to begin a transition to "point of use" heating systems, a term that Ouellette coined to mean that the space is there to cater to the occupants' use. Rather than scheduling heat, "point of use" heating relies on either a motion sensor or the act of pushing a button. By walking into a room or pushing a button on the thermostat, the system brings the temperature up from the cooler unoccupied set point to the warmer occupied temperature. Additionally, some buildings like Forest Hall and LaForce Hall have electronic temperature controls in each room, which run the heat for twelve hours after being pushed. Ouellette explained that this system, which will also be used in the new first year dorm, can lead to a lot of savings if students leave for the weekend or most of the day. Ouellette emphasized that the goal of "point of use" heating is for people to feel empowered and reclaim control over how they can conserve energy, as well as with how they interact with the spaces they inhabit.

Those small savings will prove important to our success with the Energy 2028 commitment to campus energy conservation.

Jack Byrne, dean of environmental affairs and sustainability and director of the Franklin Environmental Center, described how the work Facilities Services has been doing, and our individual actions, tie in with the college's goals for Energy 2028.

Byrne explained that there are two main strategies for reducing our energy consumption on campus – conservation, using less energy, and efficiency, wasting less energy.

"The efficiency part is around the way we design, build and renovate our buildings — it's infrastructure. The conservation part is people," Byrne said. "We can make the buildings work really well and efficiently, but we rely on people to then use the building as conservatively as possible."

That looks like closing windows, turning heat down and turning lights off. But equally importantly, reaching our 25% reduction goal means having conversations with the people around us. Having difficult conversations about energy usage and climate action are a crucial way to start the wave of change, whether it's smaller conversations about you and your roommates' usage habits, or larger discussions about the climate crisis and the role we can play.

Being part of a community where your individual actions and the thoughtful conversations you have with others can matter is a unique and powerful opportunity to reclaim some agency over climate action — even in our small corner of the world.

RYAN MCELROY/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The new first year residence hall will have a "point of use" heating system to save energy.

THE MYTH OF THE "CHINESE" LANGUAGE

Op-Ed

Aren Lau *is a member of the class of 2027.*

Middlebury College has allowed a mistake to face the public and its students since 1966. That mistake is the name of the Chinese department's language courses: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced "Chinese." Out of the nearly three hundred Chinese languages in existence, only Mandarin — the most widely-spoken language in the world and what is used in most of mainland China, Singapore and Taiwan — is taught here. That's fine; I myself am currently on track to advance to the Intermediate level. But why not call it what it is? I am proposing a change to Middlebury's current language course titles from "Chinese" to "Mandarin Chinese" or "Modern Standard Chinese."

First, I must establish my position on the difference between the terms "dialect" and "language." My father's whole family speaks Cantonese — the robust, angry-sounding tongue you usually hear in American Chinatowns — as well as some Taishanese, another tongue of Southern China. Neither language says, "Nǐ hǎo." Many don't. They are not mutually intelligible with many other Chinese languages. This is practically common knowledge to those at all familiar with the Chinese language sphere.

I will use the term "language" in place of "dialect" in this article. Referring to Chinese languages other than Mandarin as "dialects" can imply that Mandarin is the one from which all other variants deviate while still being somewhat universally comprehensible, which isn't the case.

Other students agree with me.

"Referring to the so-called 'Chinese dialects' as dialects only becomes unproblematic if we also consider Mandarin to be a dialect of Chinese," said James Chan '26, who speaks Cantonese and Mandarin.

I believe it is up to the individual's own interpretation of these linguistic realities when deciding which term to use. However, given these facts, the use of the term "Chinese" to describe a class only instructing Mandarin becomes even more unreasonable.

It is a messy description that does not properly embody the reality of the course. There is also some debate, however, over which term to actually mobilize. My use of "Mandarin" here is due to its being the most colloquially understood label, with another option being Modern Standard Chinese. As for the change of the course title, I believe each choice has its perks, with Mandarin being the more common word and Modern Standard having more technical merit. The college should defer to the opinion of experts and its faculty when making the decision.

Conversely, the use of "Chinese" is sufficient when referring to the written language, since the writing is standardized and generally understandable to any reader — so the word should remain in the name no matter what. My focus is on the spoken element.

This current course title also makes certain promises that are not fulfilled in reality. For example, my father took from the vagueness of the name that a Cantonese course would also be offered, as it is the second most-spoken Chinese language. Middlebury has no such thing.

"If the department really wants to use that term, they should be more inclusive to other dialects, too," said Kaveh Abu Khaleel '26, a student from Hong Kong who is a waiter for the Cantonese language table. "[Another student] and I talked for a long time about trying to get a Cantonese J-Term class started. Last year we had Hindi, Swahili, Hebrew, etc., so why not?"

This is not to say that I'm guilt-free. I myself have gotten into the habit of simply saying "Chinese" just because everyone else is doing it. I understand that it is common in everyday speech; however, an elite academic institution like Middlebury upholds a responsibility to maintain correctness, especially considering the political climate around the topic.

COURTESY PHOTO

Middlebury Chinese department courses are called Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced "Chinese."

As elaborated on in a 2023 Auckland University study by researchers Lin Chen and Danping Wang, the use of Mandarin has been increasingly promoted in China and its surrounding territories since the 1950s, which has contributed to the decline of numerous other languages, such as Shanghainese (Wu), Cantonese, Uyghur, Taishanese, Hokkien, Hakka and many others. Active efforts within the Chinese diaspora are being made to preserve these languages.

Additionally, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China reported how China has emphasized broadcasting in Mandarin in place of local languages to promote its nation-wide use, as orchestrated by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. This intention was named in its "Notice Regarding Strengthening the Administration of Broadcasting Dubbed Foreign Television Programs," released in October 2004.

And it's not as if Middlebury doesn't know about this situation. On March 7, the Chinese department collaborated with other departments to host "Photographer in a Foreign Land: Kevin Bubriski's Documentary Projects in Nepal, Tibet and Xinjiang." At the talk, professional photographer Kevin Bubriski discussed some instances related to the discouragement of the languages of Tibet and Xinjiang in favor of Mandarin. Yet Middlebury is still contributing to the trend in its own way.

There is something to be said about the progression of language in general; the promotion of one language over others is not a new phenomenon, and variations of this situation happen everywhere. But one cannot ignore the political elements of this development. While linguistic uniformity for the sake of stimulating economic cooperation domestically is a reasonable endeavor, this agenda also marginalizes vital aspects of Chinese identity and sometimes quiets those of its surrounding lands. By referring to Mandarin as just "Chinese," certain prerogatives appear to be supported by Middlebury College regardless of any neutral intention. Not to mention that language shapes identity in many ways; by implying that Chinese language is a monolith, the college also hints that the culture is, too. Perhaps this is not what was intended, but it is the effect.

So I implore Middlebury to choose: Either be open to including other Chinese languages under the program, or change the course titles to "Modern Standard Chinese" or "Mandarin Chinese." Regardless, the college must amend this discrepancy that has communicated ignorance for nearly sixty years.

MIDDLEBURY NEEDS A CLUB ALPINE SKI TEAM

Op-Ed

Noah Willson *is a member of the class of 2026.5.*

Middlebury is an institution with a vast array of storied DIII athletic teams. Our programs have won multiple national championships, and we have racked up 44 team national titles. Forty-one alumni have gone on to compete at the Olympic games. Our alpine ski team is one of the top DI programs on the east coast and has sent numerous athletes to National Championships this season alone.

Our club sports teams are no different: Our women's ultimate frisbee team has won the last three national championships. Despite our impressive athletic resume, widespread student interest in skiing and a perfect venue for training and competitions, there is no club alpine ski team in sight. But why?

Numerous attempts have been made to kickstart a club alpine ski program, and all have failed. The closest students have come to a racing team is the Ski and Snowboard Club, which hosts group skiing opportunities and recently put on the first-ever rail-jam for Student Ski Day at the Snow Bowl.

I have raced competitively for the last ten years, from the Cascade Mountains of the Pacific Northwest all the way to the Andes Mountains in Argentina. When I arrived at Middlebury, I wasn't able to continue competing, but I still have the same fiery passion for the sport. With this in mind, I am attempting to start a club racing team. The process has not come without its own challenges, however.

I brought my plan to the Student Activities Office (SAO) with high hopes, positivity and drive. The SAO listened attentively as I pitched Midd Club Alpine to them. I had garnered a few local brands as sponsors, collected data on interest within the school and provided information on how I'd make the team accessible to all interested. Though my pitch was well received, the idea was ultimately shut down. The biggest arguments against the club were issues of money, liability costs and the fact that we would be copying a preexisting DI sport. The SAO will only fund new clubs up to $1,000 in their first year.

Of course, there is the issue of money. Skiing is expensive; a day pass to many resorts can soar over $100. Not to mention, basic equipment costs can add up quickly. Despite this, I've calculated what the estimated cost of club alpine would be, and I believe it wouldn't take more than $10,000 to get the club off the ground. For reference, the crew team was allotted $33,000 in 2020.

Yes, skiing is dangerous! Concussions are common, ACL tears a possibility and collisions not unheard of. But the same injuries are just as common, if not more so in football and ice hockey.

Some say we already have a ski team, so there is no need for a club team. True, our NCAA DI team is successful — even a powerhouse. But to get a spot on the team often requires taking multiple post graduate years before college to refine the skill, athleticism and technique necessary to make the team. Only the best of the best can make the transition from racing in high school to competing on the NCAA circuit.

Irritated but not discouraged, I began brainstorming new ways to get the club into motion. Though we wouldn't be associated officially with the school, we could still carry on in another way. For the time being, we hope to join forces with the Middlebury Ski Club, a local non-profit team with a long-standing history of youth ski racing. Even further down the road is the concept of starting the team as a non-profit, independent of the college but built for and by its students.

COURTESY PHOTO/ NOAH WILLSON

Willson brought his plan for a club alpine ski team to the Student Activities Office.

Okay, so we don't have a club ski team…some might wonder what's the big deal? I'll tell you: club sports are the lifeblood of our college. Not everyone can play at a DIII (or DI) level in college. Club sports are more manageable in terms of athletic-strain and academics. Yet, they still provide the benefits of health and friendship just like any team.

Middlebury offers over 15 club sports, including crew, soccer and even equestrian. Funding for these organizations is often tight and relies heavily on donations and fundraising. Additionally, these sports aren't often given the support they need. The club soccer team only launched in 2021. Now, it is one of the most successful club programs on campus, with a strong record and high enrollment.

The club alpine ski team is no different. We are struggling to get off the ground but are backed by a group of highly motivated, passionate student-athletes. We are driven by memories of our childhood, ones of waking up early to carve down snowy peaks with our friends.

Here at Middlebury, we have the perfect mountain to call our home. We have a strong group of ex-racers and passionate skiers alike. We even have support from notable alumni in the ski racing community, like Erik Arvidsson (US Ski Team) and Ali Nullmeyer (Olympian, Canadian Ski Team). The only thing we need now is the funding and support from our school.

For more information or inquiries on Midd Club Alpine, visit www.middclubalpine.com or email nwillson@middlebury.edu.

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The Middlebury Campus

"LEGALLY BLONDE": ILLEGALLY GOOD

Continued from Page 1

been purely acting for Cahill. Even off-stage, she exhibited an overwhelming excitement for the show.

"It just made rehearsal so fun having a great group of people from a range of ages with great energy," Cahill told The Campus after opening night. She was surrounded by her beaming parents, who cheered the whole show.

The trio of Delta Nu Sorority members (Campbell Keller '26, Acadia Klepeis '24 and Gabriela Rosen '26) also kept energy levels high. They acted as angels throughout, responding to Elle's life with their famous "omigod" — a crowd favorite was their eager reaction to Elle making her first successful point in class.

Dancers in the cast pulled off an impressive jump rope stunt, in which they rallied behind Brooke Wyndham (Ana Holmes '27), who hit every note of the song "Whipped Into Shape" while speed jumping. What, like it's hard?

"I love playing villains, or just generally playing characters that are different than my actual personality," said Jonathan Mount '25.5, who played Professor Callahan, the condescending professor who tells the students that they need to look for "Blood in the Water" in order to be a successful lawyer, and later hits on Elle.

MCMT has not staged a spring musical since "Big Fish" in 2022, and it was many students' first-ever show with MCMT, which typically puts out one or two shows a year. Per Alexander '24.5 did theater in high school, but has stuck to improv during his time at Middlebury. His performance, however, did not appear to be that of a first-timer. His Irish jig as the sexy UPS driver and aggressive hair flips as Nikos, the pool boy, were stellar.

It was Ryan's first show as well, but it may not be her last. Although she had previously been considering completing her final semester off-campus, she told The Campus she may remain in Vermont in order to participate in next fall's production.

Responsible for this energy on stage, of course, is the work done behind the scenes.

"It was intense," said Lucy Curtis-Cherry '26, who worked on the tech crew for the show. "We didn't really have any of the set pieces or props a week ago, so a lot of the last production was this past week during tech week. And there's so many props and set moves, and that all happened in the past week."

The show was entirely student-run, which was not without its challenges.

The original director of the show, Emma Dobson '27, resigned from the position on March 28. The original choreographer of the show had also resigned just before rehearsals began, which led to the choreography being split up among different cast members.

"I feel that even though the board frequently offers its support, its actions instead lead to constant friction and unnecessary limitations to my direction," Dobson wrote in an email to the MCMT board.

Zoë Predmore '27.5, who was previously slated to take over directing during tech week due to Dobson's time conflict, took over for the last two weeks of rehearsal.

"I had such a great time meeting the cast and seeing their dedication to preparing for our performances," Predmore wrote in a message to The Campus.

Dobson cited issues with ordering costumes and rehearsal timing, and also told The Campus that she and MCMT seemed to have general disagreements on the direction of the show. She said that the club did not have enough resources to successfully put on "Legally Blonde."

"Legally Blonde is certainly a little bit more expensive," MCMT Co-president Mount told The Campus.

He said the rights to the show cost about $2,700, and Town Hall Theater takes a $1,500 fee for renting the space. The club was able to use leftover set pieces from Middlebury Union High School's recent production of Legally Blonde Jr.

Due to a new policy from the Student Activities Organization, performing arts organizations cannot use their operating budgets for ticketed performances. In order to pay for things like rights to scripts, costumes and sets, the club must use its gift account, which is funded through ticketed pricing.

As a result, Mount had to ask students to fill out a Google Form marking their attendance before the show to help the club raise enough funds through its gift account. Mount said he got 273 responses, though he estimates there were probably more attendees who did not fill out the form. He also asked the crowd to donate money for future productions if they were able.

Mount said that the club typically tries to pick lower-budget shows, but emphasized the return on investment of Legally Blonde," which had over 40 students involved. It also had three sold out performances, with tickets priced at $5 for Middlebury students and $20 for town residents.

In the last two weeks, Mount said, a mix of the change of directorial style and the time crunch energized rehearsals, and the show really came together.

"It was certainly stressful at times, but not necessarily bad stress," Mount said. "We were all building towards something together. I am incredibly proud. I feel like especially in an educational environment like a college, it's rare to see a cast of 30-plus people who are all so talented, so dedicated and so kind."

COURTESY PHOTO / LIZ DONALDSON

Legally Blonde had three sold-out performances.

Any troubles behind the scenes were invisible to the audience, who watched a magnificent production this past weekend. Oh, and the next time you pick up a copy of The Middlebury Campus, try out the bend and snap technique to see if you can catch the attention of those around you.

Editor's note: Acadia Klepeis '24 is the Senior Arts & Culture Editor for The Campus.

Turning a new page: 10 books for graduating seniors

By SARAH MILLER
Editor at Large

As an English major, people often make small talk with me by asking about my favorite books. I vastly prefer this question to the alternative question about my degree: "So, what are you going to do with that?" Like most English majors, I read a lot, both for school and for pleasure. After I finish a semester, my reward is a trip to the bookstore where I can indulge in the books that I held off reading due to my coursework. To be clear, this is not a list of my favorite books. That list is unstable, shifting depending on the hour, the mood or the person asking. Instead, this is a list of books tailored to graduating seniors (though anyone could find some pleasure in them) — books that I hope will offer a balm or a new perspective as we prepare for the next phase of our lives.

"The Secret History"

This book is the closest thing Middlebury has to a founding text. Written by Donna Tartt, a graduate of the nearby Bennington College, "The Secret History" sets its inventive murder mystery in a small liberal arts college in rural New England which, except for a Bennington artsiness for which Middkids are just a little too square to match, bears a striking resemblance to Middlebury. It's not just my opinion, though: Former Campus Editor in Chief Riley Board wrote an op-ed in 2021 explaining why "The Secret History" motivated her application to Middlebury. Regardless of the Middlebury connection, the novel offers readers the pleasures of dynamic characters, gorgeous prose and a propulsive plot.

"The Marriage Plot"

Jeffery Eugenides' novel opens on a day sure to strike dread in the heart of any senior: graduation. The Kaia Gerber-approved book traces a love triangle among three recent graduates of Brown University, focusing on Madeleine, an English major trying to decide if there's any place for the marriage plot in the reign of Derrida. If all of this sounds, well, too "English major," don't fear: At its heart "The Marriage Plot" is a classic coming-of-age story in which young people brought up in the humanities grapple with their entrance into the "real world." Relatable, no?

"White Noise"

Don DeLillo belongs to the class of authors whose novels remain scarily prescient about their predicted futures (See also: Ling Ma's "Severance" and Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale"). I read "White Noise" last summer in the weeks following the Canadian wildfires that blanketed much of the Northeast in hazardous air. The novel follows a nuclear family that must flee their home after an "airborne toxic event" moves into the college town where they live. This book is frightening in its ability to strike at our complacency in the face of disaster. Though it was published almost forty years ago, "White Noise" continues to be one of the foremost novels to help me understand the world we will inherit.

"Middlemarch"

I'm a huge proponent of the infamously long novel. That being said, I'm of the opinion that most long novels don't justify their length. "Middlemarch" remains an exception. Praised by Virginia Woolf as "one of the few English novels for grown-up people," it has been an influence on some of our greatest writers for its psychological complexity and beautiful prose. What makes "Middlemarch" stand out among the pantheon of social novels (most of which I also adore) is its rigorous commitment to empathy. Even as we, humble readers, pick our heroes and villains, Eliot forces us to see the individual dignity in each character and the complex why that underpins their behavior. This is an invaluable lesson at any stage in our lives.

SKILES ROBERTS-SALVADOR

"White Teeth"

If you ever want to feel inadequate, here's the reminder that Zadie Smith wrote her award-winning debut novel when she was 21 years old. Like many writers, she has come to (wrongly) regret her first novel, which also has the misfortune of being her best work. Since I was eighteen, I've read this book three times (once for pleasure and twice for class), and each time I've come away impressed again by its humor and intelligence. For a novel that is so many things — the urban novel, the multi-racial novel, the globalized novel — it is a forever recommendation of mine because it is also a novel that makes me cackle aloud while reading it in BiHall for the third time.

"The Right to Sex"

One of the most bracingly intelligent essay collections I've read, this is also a book that will draw attention to you if you read it in public. However, don't let the potential for juvenilia put you off. Amia Srinivasan, an Oxford philosophy professor, is one of our foremost thinkers, and it's just our luck she turned her gaze to interrogating sex as a serious academic subject. Srinivasan's essays eschew easy answers, or definitive answers at all. Each essay made me less rather than more sure of what I knew before reading them, which is the benchmark by which I judge all worthwhile essay collections.

"The White Album"

"We tell ourselves stories to live," begins Joan Didion's towering essay collection. In the days following her death, this was the quote that appeared on inspirational Instagram tributes and tote bags alike. The appropriation of Didion's quote, which is about the very instability of the stories we tell, almost proves its point. "Or at least we do for a while," she continues. "I am talking here about a time when I began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself." In her opening, Didion chronicles her time in psychiatric care, as a result of a disorder she presents as being symptomatic of the unrest of the 1960s. We are of a generation uniquely tired of hearing about these "unprecedented times." Reading Didion, and this book in particular, helps remind me that unprecedented times, and even calamitous times, are nothing new. If Didion can approach them with her cool intelligence, maybe we can too.

"Slow Days, Fast Company"

In most respects, Eve Babitz is the anti-Joan Didion: an effervescent stylist insistent on defending hedonism and California. The two women had a famously contentious friendship. However, Babitz is no slouch. She's the rare party girl who works off a hangover by reading Virginia Woolf by the beach or churning out a short story. There are many very important, and maybe even necessary, essay collections I could recommend to help you better understand the way we live, but Babitz's writing shows us how to savor life.

"Norwegian Wood"

With "Norwegian Wood," Haruki Murakami set out to write something different from the magical realism that had made him popular in Japan. Ironically, this is the book that made him an international name. A deceptively simple story of college boy meets college girl meets bildungsroman, Murakami captures the lushness of the 1960s, nature (I can still taste the cherry blossoms in my mouth) and heedless young love with uncommon power. Be warned, it's really sad.

"Normal People"

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you've already read Sally Rooney's "Normal People." It's one of those books I'm embarrassed to admit affected me so much (I read this after my first breakup). Along with its intelligent commentaries on class and sex, it's an enduring tribute to how people can change each other for the better even when they have left each other behind. At the time, I applied that truism to my high school boyfriend. Now, I apply it to the people I've been lucky enough to know and love here.

Reel Critic: "Problemista"

By CHARLIE KEOHANE
Editor at Large

In a mere 98 minutes, "Problemista" captured my heart. Comedian Julio Torres wrote, directed and starred in the surrealist comedy film, which follows Alejandro (Torres), an aspiring toy designer from El Salvador. After losing his job, Alejandro is connected to a funky art critic, Elizabeth (Tilda Swinton), who promises to sponsor Alejandro's visa if he can help her present an art show for her late husband. This deal spurs a chaotic journey around New York City as Alejandro tries to fulfill Elizabeth's wishes to secure his sponsorship.

The world-building in "Problemista" is exquisite and rich, blending elements of fantasy into the bleak reality of the immigration process. Part of buying into "Problemista" is accepting the film's strange details; for example, Elizabeth's husband is cryogenically frozen, and his life work was creating a series of egg paintings. The film is narrated by Isabella Rossellini, which adds to its storybook, genre-bending nature.

The surrealist tone of "Problemista" shines through a series of whimsical metaphors. Alejandro's immigration journey is visualized as a maze of cubicles through which he endlessly crawls while an hourglass painstakingly measures his limited time. In one scene, when an immigrant is denied status, she disappears in a poof and the paper she holds falls to the floor. By taking the time to establish this world and its challenges and contradictions, Torres is effectively able to criticize it.

The filmmaker's visualizations might seem heavy-handed to some, but they effectively illustrate Alejandro's journey and bring levity to the film. For instance, as he searches for cash, Alejandro turns to Craigslist, which is personified as a hilariously mischievous sea witch (Larry Owens). The film definitely veers into dark territory at times; I gripped my seat when Alejandro accepted a sketchy job involving an uncomfortable sexual encounter.

Elizabeth is disorganized, stubborn and mean at times, sometimes presented as a hydra that Alejandro battles. I understand why some critics call "Problemista" a "messy debut" and criticize Swinton's character as overpowering. At times, I struggled to understand why Alejandro remained tethered to Elizabeth despite her difficulties and lack of assurance about a visa sponsorship. I also found myself curious about Alejandro's initial journey to the U.S., which is only described as a cave he was tempted into as a child. Ultimately, there is a decent amount of suspension of disbelief needed to appreciate Torres' kooky creation, which occasionally feels rough around the edges.

Alejandro is a sympathetic and funny character, and I admired how he navigates such a sticky web of challenging social and economic situations with the unwavering hope of achieving his dream: a job at Hasbro Toys. There are bright spots of kindness throughout the film, from the immigration officer who looks out for Alejandro to the sweet and strong connection Alejandro maintains with his mother, Dolores (Catalina Saavedra), who works as an artist in El Salvador.

The film features a strong supporting cast as well, from Elizabeth's late husband Bobby (RZA) to Bingham (James Scully), her privileged secondary assistant. The fabulous Greta Lee pops in for a fun and dramatic scene as Bobby's former apprentice. Even without full arcs, these side characters add to the colorful nature of the film.

New York City is a background character itself, from the constant trash to Alejandro's cramped apartment filled with eccentric, annoying roommates.

Spoiler: I will say that the ending is pretty zany, which was on par for the rest of the film. Right as it seemed "Problemista" was coming in for a landing, it suddenly veered off in a strange direction before flashing forward centuries into the future in a way that felt a little overkill. I was also not sold on Alejandro and Elizabeth's friendship being strong enough to transcend space and time.

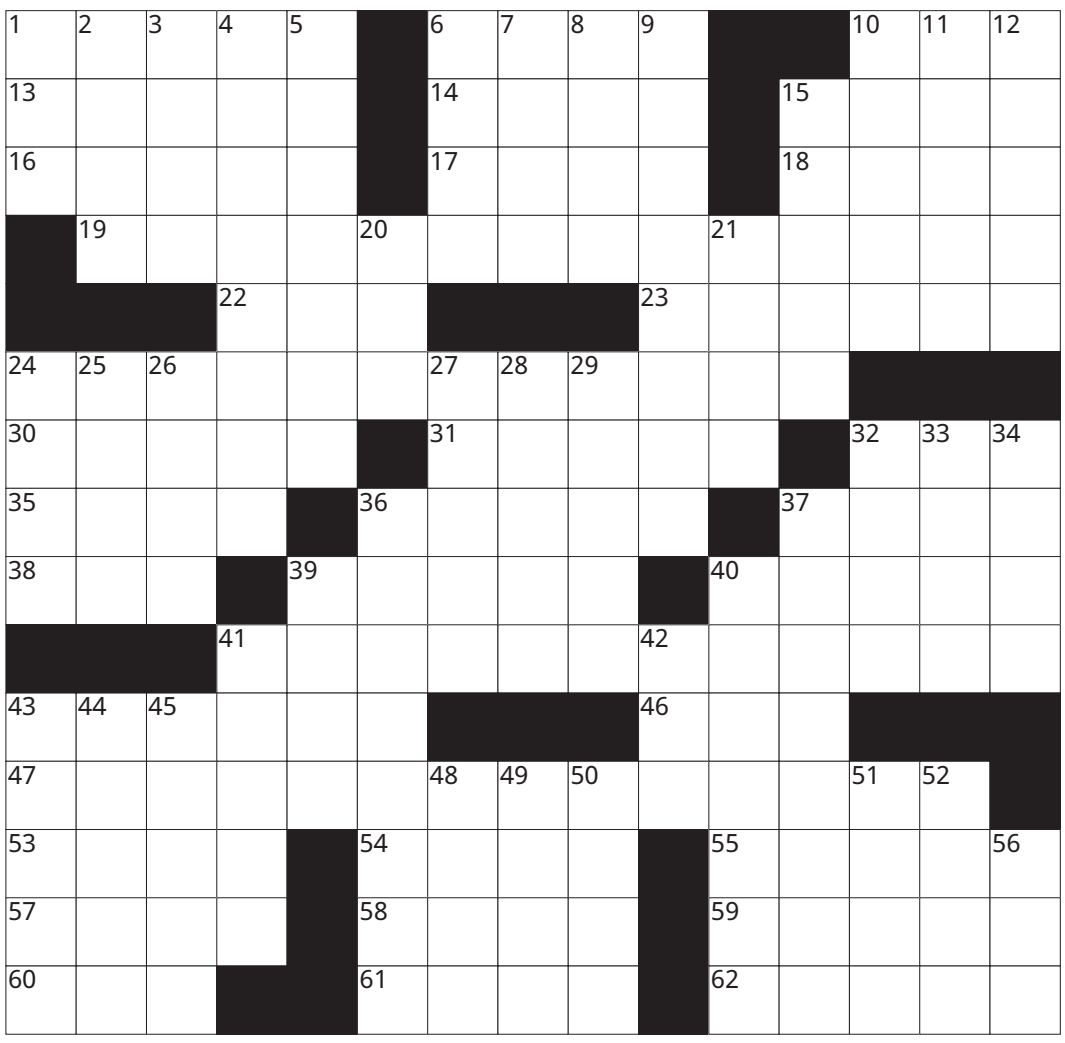
Despite its flaws, I loved "Problemista" because it feels fresh and funky while also portraying heartbreakingly real struggles. Being short and digestible, the film doesn't overstay its welcome. It felt like an original piece of media based on lived experience that was spun out in a creative way. Torres packs so much into "Problemista" — and though that might be the downfall of the film — it touches on intergenerational and cross-cultural relationships while telling a story about art, creativity, love and loss. Torres is definitely a talent to keep an eye on.

"AN IMAGINATIVE, IMPRESSIVE, AND HILARIOUS TWIST ON THE AMERICAN DREAM."
–SLATE
PROBLEMISTA
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JULIO TORRES

COURTESY PHOTO
Middlebury showed "Problemista" as part of its Hirschfield Student Programming.

Swiftly Solving

Avery Goldstein and Winter Heaton



ACROSS
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10 Nail polish brand
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9 Card game with liquor in its name
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28 Beethoven's "___ Joy"
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THE BEST OF THEATER: "THE WORST MOTHER IN THE WORLD"

By ZIYING JIAN
Contributing Writer

As three women each navigate the burden of motherhood, expectations and women's health, their lives intertwine in "The Worst Mother in the World," a play by New York-based playwright Kari Bentley-Quinn. The show opened at the Hepburn Zoo on Thursday, April 11, serving as the senior directing work of Caroline Armour '24, senior acting work of Katelyn Wenkoff '24 and senior lighting design work of KK Newton '24.

The play began by introducing Nina (Wenkoff), who is adjusting to motherhood amidst frightening nightmares and anxiety attacks. Nina's therapist (Victoria Fischer Luksch, a local actor and academic coordinator for multiple departments) supports her through this journey while also facing challenges with her estranged pregnant daughter Mary (Molly Snow '26).

As friendship, misunderstandings and personal differences intertwine, the lives of these three women become increasingly complex, culminating in the audience witnessing powerful confessions that reveal motherhood to be a blend of emotions beyond simple love or hate.

"I wanted to produce this play in order for real people to see themselves and their real struggles represented on stage. Putting visualizations to mental health issues and bringing to life these visceral fears gives us a profound opportunity to empathize withthree women who are not always on their best behavior" Armour wrote in her Director's Note.

One of the most captivating elements of the performance was the occasional appearance of a mysterious masked figure (Pearl Benjamin '24.5), referred to as a puppet and adorned in a black bodysuit with a wrapped head and a single-paned goggle. This presence emerges in Nina's nightmares. During scene transitions, the figure deftly manipulates objects within the set, erasing whiteboards or repositioning paintings.

While symbolizing Nina's inner turmoil, Benjamin's precise and deliberate movements infused the figure with an eerie aura, leaving a profound impact on the audience and further adding psychological depth to Nina's character. At the height of the production, the figure makes a striking entrance into Hepburn Zoo, wearing a costume evocative of a vaginal motif. These fleeting yet powerful performances by the figure injected a nuanced layer of tension, further heightening the already immersive experience of the production.

The use of lighting also added to the deeply emotive experiences of the characters' experiences. Nina's nightmares are brought to life with dark shades of purple and blue, accentuated by a red spotlight that captivated the audience's attention. Conversely, scenes set in the therapist's office are bathed in a comforting yellow glow, signaling a return to reality. Notably, a black-and-white portrait of the masked figure looms in the background, its gaze seemingly locking with the audience's, almost daring viewers to avert their eyes.

The rehearsal process began at the start of the spring semester with a couple of weeks of tablework, during which the production team analyzed and unpacked the script. Following this, actors attended three to four sessions per week to refine their performances as Armour directed. The cast had weekly production meetings, including set, costume, lighting and sound directors, every Monday to track progress and ensure they were on schedule. In the final two weeks before the production, rehearsals were held daily.

One challenge faced by the production team was determining the appearance of a mysterious puppet, as the script provided limited details. However, thanks to the innovation of set designer Qinyi Hua '25, the masked figure came away as one of the most memorable characteristics of the production. Hua's contributions extended beyond the puppet; she also optimized the limited space at Hepburn Zoo to depict various scenes. While the production primarily unfolded in the therapist's office, other settings like the gynecologist's office and a park were also portrayed.

A personal challenge for Wenkoff was portraying a character dealing with chronic stress, anxiety and motherhood, which were unfamiliar experiences for her. To tackle this, Wenkoff delved into research by consulting individuals in her network who had undergone similar life situations.

"Victoria [Fischer Luksch], who played Bonnie, the therapist — she's had five kids, so she was a huge wealth of knowledge," Wenkoff said. "She shared her own experiences and those of her friends, providing valuable insights into the complexities of parenting multiple children."

Despite these challenges and the shorter rehearsal timeframe, Wenkoff learned the importance of one thing in this production: trust. "To trust the process and to trust your team because I'm a perfectionist so I like to have my hands in everything, but with things like this you have to trust your team," Wenkoff said.

COURTESY PHOTO
"The Worst Mother in the World" was the senior thesis of Caroline Armour '24, Katelyn Wenkoff '24 and KK Newton '24.

"The Worst Mother in the World" delves into the shared experiences and emotions often concealed within a mother's private realm, bringing them to the forefront of the stage. The audience experiences a multifaceted depiction of motherhood that challenges and reshapes perceptions of maternal roles, emphasizing the sacrifices, triumphs and mistakes that all women make in the pursuit of raising a family.

Armour dedicated the show to her own mother, who sat in the audience.

"To my own mother, who was nothing of the sort," she wrote in her Director's Note. "I would pick you to be my mother again in every lifetime."

As the production concluded at midnight, a resounding standing ovation underscored a collective realization among the audience: It's our mothers' first time being mothers, too.

SHOULD WE BAN TIKTOK?: MIDDLEBURY WEIGHS IN

By TURNER BRITZ
Contributing Writer

Rarely do the words "Alexander Hamilton" and "TikTok" appear in the same sentence outside of the musical theatre community, but on April 11, the Alexander Hamilton Forum presented an event entitled "Should We Ban TikTok?" in BiHall. The event was situated in the context of the recent bill, H.R. 7521, which aims to either ban TikTok or force divestiture by ByteDance to enable American ownership. In an unusual display of Congressional bipartisanship, H.R. 7521 has already passed the House by a vote of 325-65.

At the Middlebury event, during which a speaker represented both sides of the debate, the discussion hinged on whether concerns about Chinese Communist Party Surveillance and manipulation through TikTok are great enough to justify banning an app that so many Americans freely chose.

Klon Kitchen represented the pro-TikTok ban position. With a background in national security, intelligence and foreign policy, he is currently a non-resident senior fellow at the center-right think tank The American Enterprise Institute. His roles have focused on examining the intersections of technology and American foreign policy. Kitchen's central concern is one we have heard echoed by many policymakers: China is using TikTok as a means of spying on and manipulating Americans.

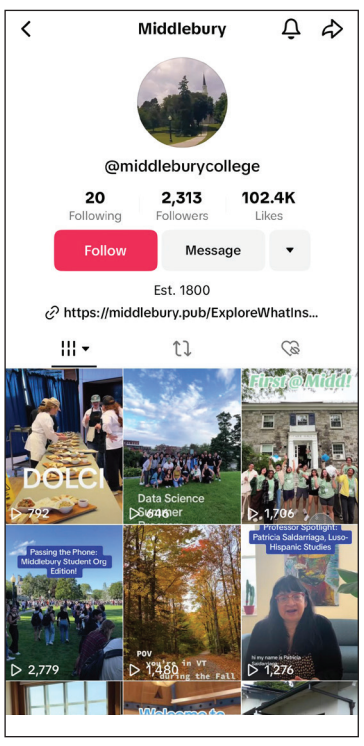
On the other side of the debate, Paul Matzko defended the use of TikTok. Matzko is the author of the 2020 book "The Radio Right: How a Band of Broadcasters Took on the Federal Government and Built the Modern Conservative Movement." He currently works as a research fellow for media studies at the Cato Institute. He also has 46.6k followers on TikTok.

In addition to claims that the TikTok ban would not achieve its purported goals, Matzko emphasized in his argument that such a ban could be considered a violation of Americans' rights to freedom of speech.

To start, each speaker was given about 20 minutes to plead their case. Kitchen went first. After letting the audience, primarily students, know that he does not judge us for using TikTok because, unlike him, we don't have to think about the "bad people out there," he launched into an analogy taken from one of his old tweets: "What if I told you China has deployed 120 million sensors around the US that can track your travel, your friendships, your habits, where you live, where you work, and 1,000 other details? Would that scare you? Well, [TikTok] has more than 120 million US users."

Throughout his presentation, Kitchen emphasized the geopolitical tension between the United States and China. He pointed out the fact that the Chinese Communist Party has the right to request data from any company based in mainland China (ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, is based in Beijing).

There is precedent for this bill, Kitchen argued: The Committee for Foreign Investment in the United States forced Chinese divestiture from Grindr in 2020 (notably, the committee has not made any decisions about TikTok). Emphasizing the risk he perceives, Kitchen noted that if he, while working for the CIA, could have built an app to spy on Chinese citizens, he would have done so without blinking. This brought him to his final point: China has banned American social media apps, so why shouldn't we do the same? He failed to mention that TikTok's senior leadership is based in Singapore, and the app is fully banned in mainland China.



COURTESY PHOTO
Even Middlebury College is on TikTok these days.

Matzko said his piece next, highlighting the lack of material evidence upholding the allegations that TikTok has a direct line to the Chinese Communist Party. He noted that historically, vague appeals to national security have burned Americans; his examples included the American invasion of Iraq, founded on unverified claims about "Weapons of Mass Destruction," as well as the McCarthyism campaign, which violated numerous American freedoms in the name of "fighting communism."

He conceded that the Chinese Communist Party could hypothetically request data on Americans from TikTok, but that no evidence exists for such activity. Matzko argued it is strange that, given the desire for evidence of surveillance, and the large amount of hypothetical eyes needed to move this data out of the U.S. and into China, no whistleblowers have come out with proof of data transfers. In the absence of such evidence, Matzko described that the U.S. has no right to bar access to an app that simultaneously serves as a platform for free expression, entertainment and education, as well as a professional resource for many Americans, from influencers to small business owners.

It's worth noting that, based on their casual remarks, both speakers tended to presume as a matter of fact that the vast majority of Middlebury students were avid TikTok users. Although this is certainly true for myself and others, it is not the rule. Based on the conversations I've had on campus, it seems that far more Middlebury students used to have TikTok than have it right now. TikTok's addictiveness and the potential it holds to be a distraction is often cited as the reason use is discontinued. The addictive aspect of the app (which is true of most social media platforms) was not a focus of the conversation during this event.

During a relatively heated Q&A session following the speeches, Kitchen recapitulated his argument that China is spying on Americans: 80% of TikTok's developers, he said, are based out of China. Matzko responded to this by saying that developers are not the people who would ever look at raw data.

In another back-and-forth, Matzko alleged that Rep. Mike Gallagher, a key advocate for the bill, was to take a job with the surveillance technology company (and defense contractor) Palantir, which also called for the ban. In his rebuttal, Kitchen said he knew Gallagher personally, and he actually hadn't decided for sure yet.

Many of the day's arguments played out in spaces of ambiguity, abstractly exploring the meanings of free speech and the hypotheticals that would enable or disable Chinese Communist Party access to TikTok. Given the relative lack of material evidence presented during the talk, the audience's prior personal convictions likely played a large role in their views of Matzko and Kitchen's arguments. It seemed based on audience questioning that many were skeptical of the idea that TikTok posed any legitimate threat to national security.

From this murky, subjective discussion, one particularly tangible point arose. In the contemporary digital ecosystem, all of us are getting our personal data logged and sold at competitive prices on an open, legal and international market. What's more, many of the companies who participate in this market-oriented surveillance are American. The Chinese Communist Party is readily able to buy any of this data, so what use do they have for another avenue to access this same information? Matzko made this point in his speech, and during the Q&A, one student asked it explicitly to Kitchen.

While Kitchen argued that the Chinese Communist Party was both surveilling through TikTok and buying data, he provided no basis for this claim. Eventually, Kitchen conceded that banning TikTok would not limit the Chinese Communist Party's access to American data. By the end of the Q&A, Kitchen's argument hinged essentially on convincing us that he had access to information beyond the audience's security clearance.

Should Kitchen be trusted? Does he privately hold evidence that would verify claims about the danger TikTok poses to American security? Or is this, as Matzko argued, just another situation in which vague appeals to national security legitimize actions with dangerous implications? One thing is certain: Whether or not we are allowed to go on TikTok, as online Americans, our data is not private — it is a publicly available commodity.

AMATEUR VS. ATHLETE

Batting practice with recent NESCAC Player of the Week

By LEXI LINAFELTER
Sports Editor

Welcome to Amateur vs. Athlete: a column where we, lowly sports writers of The Campus and fans of our beloved Middlebury Panthers sports teams, delve into the mind of an in-season varsity athlete by challenging them to a one-on-one competition in their craft.

This week, I joined Mitchell Schroeder MIIS '24 in a battle against the mini "hack attack" pitching machine.

Ah baseball, America's favorite pastime!

Candidly, baseball is one of the only mainstream sports I have never been able to indulge in. I swear I tried, but every time I failed to understand what tension of the game has kept millions of fans adoring the sport. The slow pace of the game and repetitive nature of the sport make jaw-dropping plays few and far between to the untrained eye. Sure, there is an obvious athleticism to baseball, though admittedly, it is one I would always assume I could handle with ease. As is starting to be a trend in inviting polished varsity athletes to a solo showdown in their area of expertise, my preconceptions were entirely incorrect.

Should you check out the attached highlight reel online — and I recommend you do if you would enjoy a laugh at my expense — you will notice a clear distinction between the immense force Schroeder was able to generate compared to my amateur attempt. Schroeder walked me through the mechanics of hitting to the opposite field while we loosened up off the tee. Once I had graduated from step-back drills, we geared up the "hack attack," which allows the hitter to see the angle of release, simulating a live arm sense of timing and location.

Fans of baseball, or even more casual viewers who may only know the sport through "Moneyball," understand the importance of statistical analysis to the modern game. In order to observe as many in-depth statistics as possible, Middlebury's advanced system allows the hitter to see the location of their hit, the launch angle and the exit velocity of their hits from within the batting cage. The majority of pitches I faced stayed well under 70 mph, a fraction of the speed of the pitches that Shroeder and his teammates face on a daily basis, and the few times I did manage to connect with the ball resulted in virtual outs.

Despite the unimpressive velocity of my swings, I must admit that the feeling of a hit was satisfying, exciting and opened my eyes to the intoxicating nature of a sport I had never understood.

Given my total inexperience with a bat in my hand, I was lucky to face the challenge with a true heavy hitter. Schroeder could do no wrong against Bowdoin College on April 6, earning NESCAC Player of the Week and surpassing the 100 career-hits mark, now standing at 110 during his time in a Panther jersey.

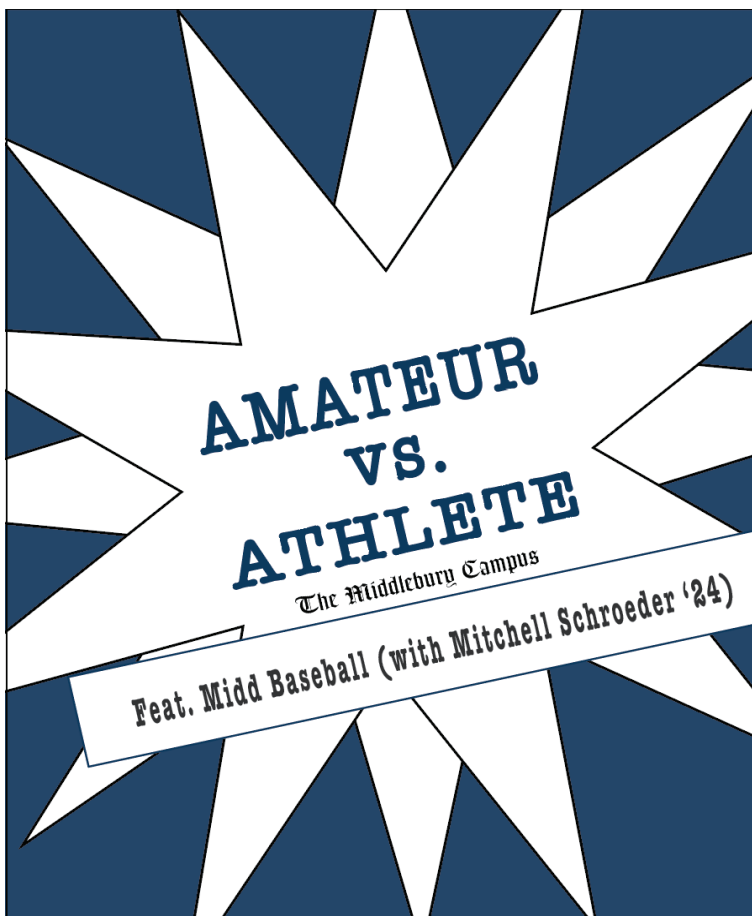
To gain an insight into his baseball prowess, I questioned Schroeder about his career, his game-day routine and the biggest challenges of the sport.

Lexi Linafelter: How did you get started playing baseball?

Mitchell Schroeder: I started playing baseball when I was six years old and I saw my friend from school, Lucas, wearing a really cool jersey. I obviously wanted a jersey too, so I showed up the next day, started playing baseball, and that was that!

LL: What is your favorite part about baseball?

MS: It's kinda corny, but getting to come back to your teammates after doing something well is really the best feeling in the world. I've obviously had some highs and lows throughout my time playing baseball but the thing that gets you through the lows is thinking about the feeling when you do succeed, and you get to celebrate with your teammates, that is the best part of the sport.



LEXI LINAFELTER / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

LL: If you could play another position in baseball, which would it be? Why?

MS: I think playing shortstop would be so fun just because they're so athletic. Watching our shortstops, Chris [Borter], Zip [Malley] or Baker [Angstman] play is so fun because they get to make a ton of cool plays and doing that would make me feel a lot more athletic than I am.

LL: What is the hardest part about the sport?

MS: You can do everything right that you can control, and you can still get out or strike out. It's a sport where the results don't necessarily match the preparation and that can be really frustrating. On the flip side, one of the best parts of the sport is that sometimes you can get away with things that you shouldn't have, but I think it's really challenging to play a sport where you can do everything right but still fail. So of course, failure is very common but learning how to deal with failure is so important and is something that I will take with me from the sport for the rest of my life.

LL: What's your walk-up song? Why?

MS: "The Devil is a Lie" by Rick Ross. Ross is my favorite rapper and I won't choose any other artist for my walk-up song. I switch songs from season to season, but this year it's been "The Devil is a Lie," and I am loving it so far.

LL: You've put up a great season so far, but you had a massive day yesterday in a doubleheader against Bowdoin — you went four for five at the plate, hit 12 RBIs, two grand slams and a double across on the weekend. Was there magic in the air? What about yesterday made you so successful?

MS: That was such a fun day. The wind was blowing out and I got some good pitches to hit. Something really great about playing for this team is that they really can't pitch around you to get to the next guy, so you're gonna see pitches to hit; if they get around Borter, they have to deal with me and if they get around me, they have to deal with Kyle McCausland '25, NESCAC Player of the Year [2023]. I'm lucky to play with guys who you can't get around and was lucky enough to put a couple of good swings on the ball.

LL: What's in store for the rest of the season?

MS: A lot of fun competition. We have our NESCAC series coming up, this weekend we have Amherst, then Wesleyan away and all of those games will be really important for seeding for playoffs. Those are always really fun baseball games and just competing every single day is something that I'm looking forward to.

While my hitting stats did not quite earn me a spot in the lineup this season, you can check out several critical games in the Panthers' latter half of the regular season at Forbes Field. Middlebury will take on NESCAC opponent Amherst College (17–5) on April 19 and 20 at home.

Editor's Note: This interview has been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

New fields, amenities unveiled for baseball and softball amidst strong at-home streaks

By CHARLES CROUNSE
Senior Sports Editor

Middlebury unveiled the latest addition to its athletic facilities on Sunday, April 7, as the baseball and softball teams gathered to celebrate their newly renovated, $2.8 million fields. The ceremony was attended by players, coaches, parents and donors ahead of the teams' games.

The new fields are home to a variety of upgrades, including but not limited to a synthetic playing surface, a bullpen, batting cages and covered dugouts. For years, the baseball and softball teams vied with Middlebury's many other programs for indoor field space in the winter months and were often relegated to irregular time slots. Now, with the traditional grass and dirt surface making way for artificial turf, the teams are able to play outdoors starting as early as February.

Director of Athletics Erin Quinn '86 was full of praise for the new installment.

"Playing with the snow in the background while the team was racking up runs was the realization of a longtime dream," Quinn said to the small crowd in attendance at the fields' unveiling. "Being able to provide this facility is a thrill for all of us involved."

The ability to play during the snowy months of winter and early spring means much more than just playing with a scenic backdrop, a point reaffirmed by Head Baseball Coach Mike Leonard.

"We can play more home games on the new field," Leonard announced to the group. "This year, we have a record number of home games."

So far, the home-field advantage is paying off for the Panthers. The baseball team has capitalized on the new turf, earning a formidable 9–2 at home record on Forbes Field. The softball team has a 5–3 record on home soil, including a five-game winning streak that they put together from March 27 to April 7. With more games on campus than ever before, the Panthers are relishing the chance to not only play in front of home fans but also to play on familiar terrain, aiding both teams in their NESCAC charges.

The new fields have made more than just a tangible difference in the seasons of the baseball and softball teams. Head Softball Coach Kelly Bevere '99 pointed out that the new facilities have impacted the daily lives of her athletes for the better.

"The ability to start practices right after classes and labs are over at 4:30 instead of waiting until after 6 p.m, to practice inside has given our student-athletes more time for studying and proper nutrition," Bevere explained.

The players appreciate the changes too.

"It is hands down the nicest field I've ever played on," Jewel Ashbrook '24, a pitcher for the softball team wrote in an email to The Campus.

Lucas Flemming '24, an outfielder for the baseball team, was equally impressed.

"The renovations also make it feel like a stadium rather than just a field, which enhances the atmosphere for players and spectators" Flemming said.

The debut of the new baseball and softball fields marked the completion of a multi-year project to improve the facilities. After several years of fundraising, construction teams broke ground last summer and completed the new fields ahead of the 2024 season.

"I want to give a big thank you to the facilities crew who did an amazing job," Quinn said.

The crew continues to maintain the field before and after games, correcting any imperfections in the turf to provide the Panthers with some of the finest fields in the NESCAC.

CHARLES CROUNSE / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Unveiled on April 7, the new Forbes Field includes an artifical turf surface, coverered dugouts and a raised left field fence.

PROCTOR DINING HALL:

Cooking, Community and Connection

Continued from Page 1

People in leadership positions at the dining hall are viewed positively by the dining hall staff.

Proctor dishwasher Oren Rhodes reflected this sentiment and noted that managers and directors consider the needs and happiness of their staff members.

"They are just good people and they want to make us happy," Rhodes said.

"Consistently everyone is a great group," said Chris Lafambroise, a chef and manager at Proctor. "Everyone respects each other, everyone wants the college to succeed, and so they all give it their all."

Staff who were hired more recently shared a similar feeling. Wren Hobbs, a Proctor cook who worked in a similar role at a restaurant in town for 9 years before coming to Middlebury, commented on the sense of togetherness she felt almost immediately after being hired by the college.

"It's a totally different atmosphere and a lot more team oriented and I love it. I've only been here less than two years and I think it's like the greatest thing," Hobbs said.

Even though there is a predominantly positive sentiment shared by the staff, recent changes may threaten this sense of community and belonging among Proctor employees.

Dining hall staff who spoke with The Campus described a guarantee on not implementing a hard cap on wages was one way the college was initially able to maintain such robust tenure among its staff. Since the implementation of the skill matrix compensation system in July 2022, the college has gone back on this policy, establishing a fixed income ceiling for both salary and hourly wages within each pay grade.

The cap reduces the incentive for long-term employees to stay in a job where there is no more room to grow.

"We were told there'd never be a cap on pay, that there would never be a ceiling. And now with our new system, there's a cut where you can start out and where you can get to," Whitney said.

Whitney estimated that in the last 15 years, there have been a combined 500 years of service lost among staff that decided to leave for salary reasons. Many of the individuals who resigned left with 30 or 40 years of experience each.

"Let's say you have 20 years left of service, you might get a cost of living, because the market might go up. But there's still a ceiling. So is it worth dedicating many more years of service to really never move?" Whitney said.

Whitney is not alone in asking this question. Many cooks at Middlebury must now weigh if their wages are enough when deciding whether or not to stay on staff at the college. While some decide that the benefits the college offers are a compelling enough reason to stay, an increasingly competitive job market is making these perks less attractive. The strong sense of community that so many staff valued is at risk with the steady depletion of senior staff.

In addition to changes in staff compensation policy, there have been gradual shifts in the last decade to streamline dining services, further accommodate students with dietary restrictions and create more options for dining. These shifts include stricter menus with more fixed guidelines and a proposal to switch to an "action station" system, in which one chef is assigned to make the same food every day.

"Back then we were allowed to be a lot more creative," Ashely Austin, a cook at Proctor said. "We aren't allowed to do that anymore, we have to follow the recipe, and so the cooking part isn't as enjoyable for me as it used to be, because we aren't allowed to wing it."

While these changes make sense from a consumer perspective, they deprive the job of its potential for nuance and creativity, staff said. Long-time staff fear this pattern of drifting away from autonomy for dining hall employees, as shown by the action stations, will detract from the sense of fulfillment they derive from their work.

"I think that would really probably push a lot of people away, to come in knowing five days a week you're doing one thing" Whitney said. "I'll be here for life, but I do think a reason a lot of the cooks left is they lost some kind of free rein. We still care a little, but now it's tighter parameters. But when this new system gets up and running, it doesn't matter what cook does it, it's going to be the same."

Whitney described the meaning in his job as the ability to create something that people can universally enjoy and share.

"A lot of the cooks take pride in what they do. They might push themselves a little bit more than expected just to put out the same product, a consistent product for the students. So I do feel the students really appreciate it. I mean, you'll hear a lot of them come through and say, 'I like eating here,' That's pretty awesome to hear on a daily basis," Whitney said.

Working in dining means providing an experience of commensality, in which everyone participates in some capacity. This becomes compromised in a scenario where dining is commercialized, staff members said.

If the feeling of social cohesion and mutual support is lost between staff, students will feel its effects in the dining hall. If people feel connected to the impact of their work and the importance of communal belonging, dining services will remain an interactive space, enabling some of the most essential social interactions between students and staff on campus.

While there is a fundamental agreement among staff that the workplace environment is pleasant, the camaraderie fostered around Proctor Dining Hall is at risk, particularly with new policy changes on the horizon.

PHOTOS BY JUNE SU